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GREATER LOVE
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THE GREATER LOVE

BY

ANNA McCLURE SHOLL

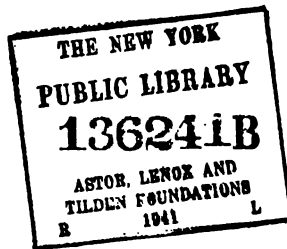
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To

MRS. GEORGE WILLIAM ALGER



BOOK ONE
THE DAUGHTER

THE GREATER LOVE

CHAPTER I

YOU do not think, then, that it is necessary to take Magnus and Edmund into our confidence?"

Thomas Hatherley leaned forward and lowered his voice to the pitch of a conspirator's. His thin, nervous hands grasped tightly the arms of his chair. His over-delicate features—the deprecating features of the middle-aged man who works for other people—expressed superlative interest in the subject under discussion.

His brother William regarded him moodily from some labyrinth of his own doubts and perplexities. He thought with a pang of jealousy that Thomas, too sensitive and ineffectual, had understood the situation, after all, better than any other member of the family, as if by virtue of a deeper than blood-kinship with Eleanor.

"Why should we tell Edmund and Magnus?" he replied. "She, herself, makes the story seem incredible. She turns it into a legitimate romance."

"With a wand of gold," Thomas said dryly. Life had not offered him many opportunities of presenting the truth to his brother; he could not let this one slip.

A flush overspread William's forehead. His keen,

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half-angry glance looked into a long-ago past of which the spirit was still active and still baffling.

"Do you mean that Eleanor's coming into this fortune changed my feelings toward her? I had always a brother's love for her, but she gave me no chance to show what I felt. She lived abroad twenty-two years. She wrote to me only three or four times, after the siege of Paris had altered her whole life. When Isabel and I went to Europe she did not see us, though a meeting might easily have been arranged. I sent money for the education of her daughter. You know it came back."

"I think she wanted something else—affection—comprehension."

"How could I give her what she had never asked for? You know her childhood was one long struggle against my authority—I, a boy of sixteen, left to be the head of a family!"

"It was fortunate you were the head," Thomas broke in. "You were the first Hatherley in three generations who knew how to make money."

His voice was faintly satirical.

"I had to learn how. You and Eleanor were dreamers. What was our inheritance?—several thousand books on the walls of this library, and the house rotting away."

"Poverty was no hardship to her. Her imagination gilded the shabbiest places," Thomas said, a reflection in his face of some pleasant memory.

"That was the trouble—she was always pretending

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life was something else than what she found it. At the crisis in Paris she expected me to share the greatest delusion she ever entertained, but my code was ethical, not æsthetic."

"You speak as if she had followed out a rule of Ruskin's," Thomas answered. "I know Eleanor! She was swept off her feet; she didn't think, she felt. And she has had another life beside the personal one. She has justified her ambitions. You seem to forget that she has a place of importance among the portrait painters over there."

"I don't forget it. I only refuse to consider it a compensation for what we as a family have suffered."

"It might be possible that she has suffered, too. She doesn't look like a woman who has forged her life out of joy. Yet she hasn't returned on her knees. She is on equal terms with us—I've wondered whether through her fortune or her daughter. I should call her daughter her greatest triumph."

"And our deepest wound," William added.

"Perhaps!" he mused a moment. "It seems strange that she should bring Constance to us, after guarding her like a princess all these years."

"She said to me yesterday that she wished her to make a French marriage with an American."

Thomas smiled.

"She has not lost her gift for paradox. Myself, I think Eleanor came back because she wanted us—because she wanted Constance to have a family, to be hedged around."

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William made no answer, being disinclined to consider his sister's motives of return to her native town, since she had come back as a person of importance to the family from many aspects. Thomas, glancing idly about the room, a big, brown cave of a library, now glazed and polished into conventional modernity, wondered whether Eleanor remembered as well as he did long, sleepy Sunday afternoons spent among the dusty, crowded books, not then shut off from human companionship in ponderous prisons of glass and mahogany. While the elder brother was planning in solitude the structure of his material prosperity, Thomas and his sister had found noble guides to accompany them through beauty-haunted realms on a troubled quest of enchantment.

Well! Eleanor, at least, had obeyed the call of the wind above the narrow hearthstone. There had been hours when he wished passionately that he had followed her to Paris, but he was then beginning his brief and unimportant married life, and during that temporary preoccupation she had been swept from him into a dramatic and inaccessible world.

Her return, for which he had always longed, had put him, despite a revival of old problems, into a state of pleasurable excitement. Life would at least cease to be commonplace! He thought with satisfaction of the day when Eleanor's visit with William over, she would leave this environment, surely over-haunted with memories, for his stepson's rectory.

William rose after a while, the lines of perplexity

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still in his forehead. His tall, commanding figure drooped a little.

"We'll find the family together by this time," he said, leading the way across the hall to a spacious drawing-room, whose furnishings showed respect for tradition mingled with the ambitions of a forward-looking prosperity. An oil portrait of William Hatherley was bulwarked by stiff paintings of ministerial ancestors in gown and bands. Old pieces of furniture were supplemented by modern copies in excellent taste. A profusion of cut flowers gave the effect of delicate luxury.

Leaning with one arm on the piano, an evening paper in his hand, stood Edmund Hatherley, the son of the house, who might have been handsome had he not looked discontented. No ill-nature was in his heavy, somewhat tarnished features, but self-indulgence had spread a film over the original brightness of his youth. He was apparently oblivious of the other occupant of the room, the Reverend Magnus Brent, Thomas's stepson, who was seated in a far corner, reading. The young priest's appearance seemed designed by nature to express his calling, his clean-cut features, deep-set eyes and slender, ascetic figure being reminiscent of those beardless boyish saints who attend upon the Virgin in an altar piece. But his face was redeemed from unauthoritative adolescence by a look of grave intensity merging upon sternness, the face of an ecclesiastic to whom the church is a living personality more real than a loved woman.

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"Where is your mother?" William Hatherley asked his son.

Edmund stifled a yawn.

"I don't know, I'm sure. How d'ye do, Uncle Tom."

Magnus rose and came forward.

"Aunt Isabel was down, but finding that Mrs. Valgrave and her daughter were not here, she went away again."

"You haven't met my sister yet?" William asked.

"I only returned from the diocesan convention this afternoon."

"Of course! I wish I could have attended myself. Did the Bishop carry through his favorite measure?"

"I regret to say that he did not," Magnus answered, a touch of coldness in his clear priestly voice. William Hatherley's low-church principles seemed to him the religious expression of the conventionality and material luxury of the household.

"Our relatives are not to be duplicated in Broadhurst," Edmund said lazily, emerging from his paper. "My little cousin—and she is really mine, you know—would not be out of place in your altar window, Magnus. I predict that she will arouse the jealousy of the unsatisfied feminine, the spinsters who run to early church. I don't blame them," he added in a musing tone. "Life is dull here, and you're a good-looking chap, Magnus."

"Edmund, Edmund! that's enough," his father said warningly.

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A shade of annoyance passed over Magnus's face, but he reflected that the point of view had been somewhat justified by his own experience, so he contented himself with replying:

"Aren't you rather far afield in your conclusions?"

"Well, your predecessor couldn't get one woman out at seven in the morning; but then, he had six children and a squint!"

Magnus smiled in spite of himself. He could not be unaware of his physical and intellectual advantages over the former rector.

There was no time for an appropriate answer, for at that moment Isabel Hatherley entered, followed by her sister-in-law and niece. Magnus, as the only member of the family who had not met the visitors, came slowly forward from the group of men, his first warm impulse of welcome to these kinsfolk-by-courtesy checked through force of an unexpected and disconcerting, if pleasurable, impression. Greetings halted on his lips, while his mind swayed between his preconceived idea of the new-comers and the revelation of what they were. He had expected to see in Mrs. Valgrave a feminine reproduction of her brother William, or a pale copy of his stepfather, a middle-aged woman, whose artistic capacity would probably be expressed in vague draperies and untidy hair. Her appearance, on the contrary, was securely youthful and full of worldly distinction, investing with new appeal the mystery that had always surrounded her. This mystery might be, indeed, her crowning charm—a

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jewel gleaming through deep water. Her years of absence belonged evidently not to the past, but still companioned her closely, shut her in like courtiers. Contrasted with her, her sister-in-law, Isabel Hatherley, a blonde of the type whose freshness rarely survives maternity, had a faded and inadequate look.

Eleanor Valgrave regarded Magnus keenly, a smile hovering about her lips, as if she understood the source of his embarrassment. Then, still holding his hand, she turned to her daughter.

"This is your cousin, Constance!"

The intonation of her voice made of the words an impressive announcement, a drawing back of curtains with a gesture of revelation—*ecce!* The maternal pride, it was clear, would have rejoiced in unlimited introductions to kinsfolk taken by surprise of this child who stood in appreciative silence, as unaware of her loveliness as a flower. She had the air of a girl who has been cloistered in the lady-chapel of her mother's life, yet who has heard within that safe shelter the murmur of the outer world. Her unfinished ambiguous beauty had a touch of strangeness in it, as of a gypsy-child born in the freedom of nature; but the modeling of the features was of a nobility which proclaimed a capacity for sacrifice and concession—so Magnus thought, his imagination at once quickened.

He was allowed an uninterrupted conversation with her, for Edmund stood apart in a shyness not usual with him. Eleanor's brothers were regarding her meanwhile as if she were a painting whose preciousness

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was conveyed to them through triple asterisks. In the mind of Thomas, at least, the foreign hand that had made the painting possible still claimed her with a touch.

"I recognize so little," she said, turning to William; "I suppose I have been dreaming all these years of the old shabbiness." A wistful expression crossed her face.

To Edmund, watching her from his barrack of mute shyness, her long absence from the family was in that moment elucidated. He did not know what had kept her in Europe, but he knew what had kept her out of that circle.

"I am sure, Eleanor," Isabel said with a faint laugh, "that you can't regret the barn this house was when I married William."

Her husband bit his lip with vexation. The advent of a moneyed and middle-class bride in a house half-ruined by ineffectual aristocracy had given him the final impetus in the direction of wealth and re-born consequence, but he did not wish to be publicly reminded of it.

"It was like an enchanted castle, with rats for princes," Eleanor answered, a shade of amusement in her face. "I remember when the jonquils in the garden were our only gold. Do you recall, Thomas, how we used to brighten the library with them? I never see them without smelling old leather and dust."

"I've forgotten nothing," he said, adding in a lower voice, "not one flower you gathered."

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"Do you still live in the house you had before Lucy died?"

"No; I live with Magnus in the rectory," he answered, "close by the new St. Michael's, that you've never seen. You are coming to us when your visit here is over."

"That's to last the rest of the winter," William said in a tone of authority, whose timbre took Eleanor sharply back into the past. For a moment she was again a rebellious child, refusing to yield up either love or obedience to a brother towering over her with no better argument than a demand.

"Of course," Isabel echoed weakly, her smile going no deeper than the muscles about her thin mouth. The full tide of prosperity on which Eleanor had returned to the family had upset all her sister-in-law's preconceived ideals as to the moral ledgers of the universe.

"I think I shall look for a little house in Broadhurst, a nest for Constance to grow her American soul in—that is, if the poor chick properly has one," she added whimsically, at the same time glancing toward her daughter and Magnus, who were still talking apart.

"Magnus reminds me of a Passionist Father I met once in Rome; he was fair, too, though an Italian."

Thomas looked pleased. He was anxious that Eleanor should approve of this stepson, the refinements of whose perfected priesthood had been made possible by years of sacrifice on the part of his foster-father. He now rose gallantly to the occasion.

"My little niece is altogether charming."

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The reserve in Eleanor's face gave way to the frankness of a dominating passion. She showed in that instant that Constance was more than her daughter. She was her very soul.

"They keep them in the shadow over there. She only knew a child's Paris, in which everyone is young and gay and kind."

Edmund came forward a step.

"You've brought the whole city to us," he said with awkward hesitation—"a child's Paris thrown in."

William gave a laugh of satisfaction. Like many wealthy American fathers, he had built up the structure of his son's life from without, only to find himself on the wrong side of the masonry. Any spontaneous concession of Edmund's, therefore, was like a peep over the wall.

"The child's city is the one I love best," she replied, glancing from Magnus to Edmund to test a previous impression. She thought that she had read the latter like a novel of cheap experiences, shabby from circulation. Remembering him as the spoiled baby of a weak mother, the son of an iron-willed and narrowly religious father, the logic of his young manhood seemed inevitable. There were thousands like him in small towns all over the country; young men sapped of ambition by inherited wealth without inherited obligations; chafing in a narrow environment, yet lacking the initiative energy to break through it.

The announcement of dinner by a butler, whose incorrect cheerfulness of manner was a constant thorn

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to Isabel—the household followed Anglican forms—put an end to Eleanor's conjectures. William ceremoniously offered her his arm, and Thomas gave his to his sister-in-law. Edmund bringing up the rear of the little procession, looked faintly amused. He had his own theories concerning family parties, and this one, to his unfilial sharpness of sight, held elements of comedy.

The dinner was long and over-elaborate, weighted with much ceremony without significance. Constance watched the succession of courses with the same wonder that she listened to the conversation, so colorless a product of an occasion entitled to be memorable. She could not understand why her uncles seemed so ill at ease; why they asked their sister so little concerning her residence abroad; why the whole family appeared to be making an effort to huddle together in the present moment—too small and airless for comfort; why her aunt bestowed upon herself such insistent glances; why her mother seemed sad, despite her efforts to be gay. Constance, always responsive to her mother's changes of mood, felt a corresponding depression. Magnus, seated by her, seemed to read her thoughts.

"Don't you find it, Cousin Constance, just the least bit difficult to realize that this big new country's yours; that we're yours?"

"It is a good deal to take into one's lap at once," she said with a shy smile.

"Like a new toy?"

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"Yes; a puzzle, perhaps."

"You won't like us Americans at first, I'm afraid," he said. "We're vain and we're noisy—we're spoiled children; but then we have all the possibilities of children."

"But I know I shall like you," she said earnestly. "You are my people, and this is my country. My mother never let me forget that. I've dreamed of my country many years."

"You must like it, for if you were not happy you would go away again."

"I shall be happy," she answered, "if my mother is. After all—she is my country."

"Then we'll leave not one stone unturned to keep her here," he said eagerly.

Isabel, who had been watching Magnus, now broke into the conversation.

"My dear," she said to Constance, "what a beautiful locket you are wearing. Is it an antique?"

"It is a copy of one we saw in a museum in Italy; but it really belongs to my mother, not to me. My father's picture is in it."

She held it out to her aunt amid a dead silence. Isabel, an embarrassed look in her face, took it, studied it a moment, opened her mouth once or twice helplessly, then handed it back without a word. Constance looked across the flowers at her mother, whose face in the candle light was pale, but expressed nothing. Her brothers were gazing at their coffee spoons. Suddenly Edmund put out his hand.

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"May I see it? We have no picture of your father." He looked intently for a moment at the miniature. "He's—why—he's like the portraits of Lord Byron. What a handsome man he must have been!"

"I scarcely remember him," Constance said. "He died when I was four years old."

Her mother turned to Edmund, her face, it seemed to him in that instant, curiously foreign, unspeakably sad.

"The picture does not do him justice," she said in a low voice, then, with a proud lift of the head, she looked toward her brothers. They were still studying the silver at their plates.

CHAPTER II

MAGNUS, just returned from the family dinner, looked about his study, whose bareness emphasized the value of the one painting it boasted, the one Eastern rug, the one lovely strip of embroidery, an old altar-hanging, its colors dimmed by the incense of long-ago masses. Over the fireplace was a large ivory crucifix of exquisite workmanship. The room might have been part of an Italian monastery, its windows looking upon a garden, sentineled with cypresses or a hill-climbing road with its wayside shrines.

As he was regarding the familiar place through the eyes of another, his stepfather entered. Thomas Hatherley seemed only half at ease among the sacred symbols with which Magnus was surrounded. He had never been able to commit himself wholly to the comfortable materialism of William's house, or to the ascetic attenuations of the priest's existence. Years ago he had held out to a temperament the opportunity of self-expression, with the result that his dwelling had become an ante-chamber of the church.

"Well, what did you make of your evening?"

"A whole vacation! I feel like a new man. They will change life for us here, those charming people!"

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I understand now why you have missed your sister so much all these years!"

A look of pleasure came into the elder man's face.

"I am glad you can appreciate her. She is the same Eleanor as in her childhood under the cosmopolitan cloak."

"Her worldliness is so casual, so different from the rigidities of the wealthy people here, who dare not move lest they make the wrong social gesture. Was she always so unlike——"

"——The rest of us? She and I were chums," he said jealously; "that is, when she grew up to me. We were always together then, but William had the authority, and he did not——"

Magnus filled up the pause.

"I quite understand!"

"So she left us as soon as she became of age. She took her little inheritance of a few hundred dollars and went away to Paris."

"She married almost immediately, didn't she?"

Thomas hesitated.

"Well, yes; within two years."

"I should like to have known Godfrey Valgrave," the priest said musingly. "I should like to have known anyone Mrs. Valgrave cared for. You, of course, never saw him."

"You know I've been tied here always!" his stepfather answered with an accent of irritation. "I knew very little even of—of the circumstances of her marriage. It was during the siege of Paris. Communica-

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tion was difficult, and then Eleanor, herself, never wrote freely. I had aided her in running away, and she knew how bitter William was—her memories were all of tugs-of-war. She belonged over there, fitted over there, and so she just stayed there.”

“Ah, yes! it’s quite clear,” Magnus assented. “What isn’t clear, is her coming back.”

“I think she wishes to make an American of Constance. I know that she wants her to marry an American.”

“I cannot think of the child as marriageable. She seems to belong more to heaven than to earth.”

“In appearance, at least,” Thomas answered. The thought flashed through his mind that Constance’s inheritance from her parents should logically include only the domain of the earthly paradise.

The subject had its pitfalls. He was anxious to change it.

“Has the Bishop written you?” he asked.

“Yes; he says there is no hope of my getting a city parish, that is, a parish where my—” he broke off, then began abruptly: “He writes, in short, that it is necessary for a priest to have private means if he wants a metropolitan charge.”

“Surely not in all cases.”

“I haven’t in mind a curacy, of course. In fact, there’s a definite church—St. Helen’s—and to that church the bishop refers.”

Silence fell between them. Magnus’s ambitions had long been known to his stepfather, who had, indeed,

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given them all the material sanction within his means, from the hour when the boy, looking up from St. Augustine's Confessions, had declared his belief in his own hieratic destiny. This belief had become, after a while, the most vivid phenomenon of which Thomas was cognizant in his somewhat colorless environment. Begun as a passion for personal holiness, it was gradually merged into a passion for the church, its glory, its dominion, its supernal fate. At this point the patron's sympathy had flagged a little. Thomas's loneliness, his longing for sympathy, his scholarly temper of mind, had been at the root of his identification of himself with his stepson's interests, rather than exalted churchmanship. As do most beauty-loving natures, he had found Protestantism, in certain of its aspects, literal and banal, but there was for him an equal residuum of prose in Magnus's devotion to ritualistic practices. For the past two years he had followed the priest's lead cautiously.

"St. Michael's will do well enough for a while," Magnus said, breaking the silence, "though I sometimes think I've brought the parish as far as I can. You know what a hard struggle I've had to train my congregation—to infuse churchly feeling into them."

"They were all brought up in the low-church school; and habit is strong," Thomas said, speaking as much for himself as for the members of St. Michael's.

"I know! Well, I don't think we'll stay here forever. You want your chance, too. You've been book-keeper for Uncle William long enough. It's like

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carrying stones from one side of the road to the other to work for relatives."

His stepfather smiled grimly.

"There is poison sometimes in the blood-tie."

"Wine was in it to-night; wine in a beautiful loving cup. Let us be thankful for this new mercy."

When half an hour later he had the house to himself, he left the sermon he had begun, because a girl's face obtruded itself between him and the page; and, lighting a candle, went through a long cloister leading to the church.

St. Michael's was built in the basilica form, with an elevated choir approached from the nave by a flight of steps. To preserve its beautiful bareness had cost Magnus more than one sharp encounter with an unenlightened and wealthy vestry. Its fair spaces and simple lines were revealed on this night by the moonbeams streaming in through the stained windows, from which in argent light looked saintly eyes. The priest's footsteps echoed on the marble floor as he passed up to the central shrine. Before the altar a lamp burned, and in its obscure crimson glow Magnus knelt, his face uplifted, his slender body rigid. Earthly fancies lay soft as flowers against his heart, but he strove for the moment to pluck them away and to place there instead the crucifix.

The girl of whom he thought was meanwhile occupied with her impressions of the family to which she had been newly introduced and told that it was hers. Her mental acceptance of the fact left her with many

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unspoken inquiries. To ask questions was an impropriety of conduct sternly forbidden by her education, and emphasized by a chance remark of her mother's, that the wise obtain their answers from the questions of others. But there was no one here upon whom to lay the penalty of a vicarious curiosity, and it stirred uneasily in her bosom. She sat in the window seat of her mother's bedroom, dividing her attention between the wavering shadows of the bare tree branches cast by the moonlight on the snow and the indoor aspects in sharp contrast to the austere loveliness of the scene outside. As she thought of her mother's bed-chamber in Paris, sparsely and delicately furnished in pale wild-flower colors, and always with the scent of flowers in its atmosphere, this new background seemed incongruous.

Eleanor, in a loose gown, over which her long hair lay, was leaning back in her chair, regarding her daughter with a meditative, half-amused expression.

"Well, child of light," she said at last, "are you grateful to your mother for bringing you here?"

"I don't think that gratitude is yet my strongest emotion; I don't think I quite understand," she added, a note of apology in her voice.

"I didn't understand, either, when I was your age; so I ran away to Paris."

"Little mother—!" She paused, knitting her delicate brows. "Mother, what is it—they've missed?"

Eleanor mused, winding a lock of hair about her fingers.

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"Don't call me an egotist, *chérie*, if I say that what they missed is just myself—not the personal me, but what I stood for long ago, when this house was dim with our poverty, the reaching out, the thirst for beauty, for the wide life, the free air."

Constance nodded assent.

"I cannot see, though, how they could bear to let you go. You were then just—their little sister."

"I was nothing as meek as that. Your mother was asking questions of the universe, asking them at the top of her voice. They were tired of the din, at least William was, and they were married to home-loving women, who did not know what to make of me. My brothers saw me through alien eyes."

"Ah, they criticised you—you! these wives."

"Yes, and it fretted me because I felt they could see only a little corner of my nature. I was an egotist, dear. Perhaps I only showed them a corner. I had the habit of hiding myself from what I called commonplace people; but they had enough power over me to make me say and do contrary things. I must have been an interesting girl, but I wasn't lovable."

"Such a repentant mother!" Constance said gaily.

"I am glad you ran away and found my father."

Eleanor's face paled. She made a restless movement.

"I found more, much more, than I went for. I found—well, let us say, I found you, the wholly wonderful, precious you! I loved you even more than I loved your father."

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She rose and went over to the window seat and drew the girl's slender form into her arms. They sat in silence for a time, gazing out upon the solemn snow vistas seen between the great pillars of the porch which ran to the roof of the house.

"Tell me of your first meeting with him, as you told it to me on that day we walked to Signa."

"I couldn't tell it as I did then. I'm not in the mood."

"But tell it—as you will. It will make me less homesick. I feel to-night as I used to sometimes at the convent."

"I begin, then—to humor you—at the reception at Madame Decier's. I had spent all my money for a drawing that had taken my fancy, so that I had to go in my old gown, and to brighten it I had bought a bunch of violets."

"An extravagant bunch," Constance interposed, like a child insisting on its favorite version of a tale.

"Naturally! You know the rest. I was standing by the fireplace, and somehow my flowers were loosened and fell into the heart of the wood fire. I reached for them and burned my wrist; but another hand reached at the same time."

"You didn't know then—whose!"

"I only knew that this Englishman had a charming smile, and that I wanted to make him smile again."

"And then you sent him away because you loved art best."

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"Did I! Well, have it so, if you wish. This Napoleonic legend is capable of infinite variation."

"But one thing was sure—he came back."

"Yes, he came back—through the fire and smoke of the siege."

"Did you ever tell them here what a story that was?" Constance said eagerly. "What a wooing!"

"No; I kept it for you alone."

"And he found a little, thin, starved lady, alone, hungry, frightened."

"Yes, starved—but not for bread!" Her voice trembled a little. Whatever her experience had been, it possessed the eternal quality which gives to long-ago events the reality of the present moment. "It was a stormy romance," she went on more calmly; "all clouds and scarlet lights; then long after, the quiet dawn your childhood was to me."

"Did they at the time disapprove of your marriage, dearest?"

"My family? What makes you think so?"

"They said so little when I showed them my father's picture, I thought that I had blundered."

"You couldn't expect them to be interested in matters deep-hidden from them. What could they know of my happiness, when they had never realized how wretched I had been? And I was far away. He was all, then you were all, I needed."

"We did grow up together," Constance said, pressing her cheek against her mother's, "even though you

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immured me one year in a convent to make me, as you said, 'wholly a child of grace.' ”

Eleanor's face grew grave.

“ You were so remarkably good, but I suppose I wanted to improve on what you were—such a temptation to a mother! Shall I tell you why I've brought you here—the real reason? ”

“ Please do. I haven't wholly understood. It has been like coming to strangers.”

“ That's just the point. I want to break that down. I want you to care for your people; to make amends.”

“ To make amends! ” Constance repeated.

“ To do what I didn't. I left them; I followed my impulse; I ran away. Now I want to be reunited, reconciled, and I can do it best through you, through your patience, your tender little heart and kind ways that I didn't have. You'll be atonement for your mother; you'll take me back again into the heart of my family. I've been lonely, dear.”

“ Not with me! ”

“ Yes; you couldn't always know. I had created my loneliness.”

“ But, mother, you simply saw things they didn't see, couldn't see. I've learned that since I arrived. Don't blame yourself.”

“ Well, we'll not dwell on it. We'll live in the present, be one family in the present, if we can,” she added doubtfully.

“ You and I are one family,” Constance said. “ I

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don't admit the others, not quite yet. If they love you, I'll adopt them—even Cousin Edmund."

"You do not like him."

"Not so much as Magnus. He is more like us, mother."

"Yes, on the surface."

The girl smiled.

"But the surface is a good deal—especially, I should say, in this country."

An hour later, when Constance slept, her mother lit a candle and went softly through the silent house to a room in a distant wing, which Isabel had told her was still the same as during her long-ago occupancy of it.

To some natures, houses are never mere inanimate structures of wood and stone, but possess souls which have more than a human persistence of vitality, and which fill halls and chambers with fine electric influences, noble or sordid, inspiring or depressing, as the lives of the former denizens had been. For Eleanor the home of generations of her family was doubly haunted. The ghost of her childhood had joined those graver spirits who had suffered and prayed beneath this roof until their descendants had turned in very fatigue from the high and bitter communion with deity to secular destinies scarcely less disturbed.

She opened the door of her old room hesitatingly. A familiar perfume filled faintly the chill, shut-in air. She found that it came from the china pot-pourri jars still standing on her desk. What wealth of summer

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roses had gone to fill them—the crimson ramblers, the white English roses with orange centers, the scanty petals of the sweetbriar. The odor brought up before her the pomp and glory of hot July days, the old house, cool and gray in its flaunting garden. She could smell the pungent box, could see in the white, shimmering distance the transparent purple of the hills.

Her candle cast grotesque shadows on the walls covered with symbols of her girlish ambitions, her drawings of unidentified landscapes, her sketches of her brothers, some prints of famous pictures, and an illumined motto of her own choosing, "I follow Beauty!" Ah, she had followed it far!

She put the candle on the chest of drawers and sat down by the little bed. On a stand near its head was a copy of the "Imitation," and the Bible from which she had cleverly refuted William in many an argument by daring and unlawful interpretations. It was fat and black, with eye-destroying print, and she knew that if she opened it she would find the tissue-like film of a crushed gnat adhering to a chapter of Leviticus, and old Christmas cards and clippings of marriage and death announcements scattered through its pages. She knew she would find pencil markings of favorite chapters, and little marginal notes concerning her own conceptions of the difficult business of sainthood. She picked it up, but laid it down again without opening it.

The atmosphere of dreaming innocence imprisoned for years within these walls became for the moment more real to her than the intervening destiny. "It is

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the child who dwells here," she thought, "who is the mother of Constance. It was that child that Godfrey loved even while he killed its soul."

She was roused from her reverie by the sound of heavy footsteps. William's tall figure suddenly filled the doorway. She looked up startled, almost fancying herself again a girl to be chided for sitting up late.

"I saw a light here. I didn't know what it might be. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I wanted to see my old room. How little changed it is!"

"It was all that I had of you," he answered. "I would not let them touch it."

The words, "Then you did care!" sprang to her lips, but she did not utter them. The persistence of temperamental differences was in that moment made clear to her. She felt again her old childish desire to hide from William any genuine emotion she might entertain.

CHAPTER III

THE town of Broadhurst was old enough to possess elements of the picturesque, and to number in its social circles families who, like the Hatherleys, dated their importance from colonial times. These had formed an aristocracy which had held its own successfully until the commercial spirit arriving from the prospering world outside broke down old barriers and erected new ones. Little by little the balance of power was shifted to the money-makers who, after the manner of all conquerors, strove to adopt the higher civilization of the conquered. William Hatherley's early perception of the advantages of wealth over ancestry represented fairly the choice of his townfolk. The mills in the suburbs were symbols of a prosperity whose incoming wave bore upon its crest the new dictators who, a generation before, had not emerged from the crudities of the rustic or the unctuousness of the shopkeeper.

To this section of the community William had allied himself by his marriage with Isabel, and his discernment had been abundantly justified. He had, indeed, married by symbol a whole nation; had put himself in midstream of the only activity thought worth the trouble of a money-mad country. The big, decaying

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houses scattered here and there on the edges of Broadhurst were but monuments to the short-sightedness of other representatives of old families, to whom the wind in the corridors had cried a requiem and not, as in William's case, a challenge to make the most of existence.

Eleanor was to be re-introduced to both the old and new elements of the town's society at the Present Day Club, which had assembled for its fortnightly session in Isabel's drawing room. The opportunity of meeting Mrs. Valgrave and her daughter lent sauce to the occasion, and even put an edge to the expected desperate dullness of the usual paper compiled from encyclopedias.

"Aren't you curious to see her?" Mrs. Stilwell, the wife of the rector's warden, addressed the president, Mrs. Wayne, who had entered into her fortune just ten years later than the Stilwells, and who was yet breathless from her efforts to scamper through this dividing decade.

She answered indifferently.

"We saw two portraits by her in last year's salon. They were equal to an introduction."

"You did not know her, did you, when she was a girl here?"

The tiny whip, a reminder of the time when Mrs. Wayne was florid Edna Robinson, standing behind the counter of her father's shop, brought a bright color to her plump face, but she answered with dignity:

"No, I did not know her; I was not in her set."

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"I was so much younger than she," Mrs. Stilwell said pensively, "that I can only recall her as one of the friends of my eldest sister."

This statement affected Mrs. Wayne like a blast of cold air. She sat in helpless silence, her lips apart, her eyes of an inveterate innocence, round and accusing. She belonged to the type of woman naturally lamblike, and, therefore, open to attacks from the vulpine feminine. Her daughter Gertrude, who saw the comedy elements in her mother's character, and loved her all the more for them, now came to the rescue with a bludgeon, since Mrs. Stilwell could not appreciate rapier thrusts.

"I met a classmate of yours last week, Mrs. Stilwell—Mrs. Wing, of the class of 1870. She wished to be remembered to you." She did not wait for a reply, but walked away, wearing her rudeness like a plume. She was an imposing young woman, whose big frame betrayed an humble origin, but whose face was keenly intelligent, with something in its expression of the patience of an onlooker seeking to subdue a large nature to a narrow environment. She surveyed the chattering company as an alien, yet with a certain sympathy, the fruit of her own boredom. If they didn't have clubs and card parties and afternoon teas, what in heaven's name could they do!

Suddenly there was a hush as the hostess of the afternoon reappeared with her sister-in-law and niece, whose delay in coming to the drawing-room had already caused comment. Eleanor stood for a moment

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framed in the doorway, pausing on the threshold with an instant's timidity as she faced this assembly of women, many of whom she had known in her girlhood. She had the inevitable self-consciousness of the prophet who returns to his own country, knowing that his old childish garments are more real to his townsfolk than the prophetic mantle. But, downing the realization, she came forward, her hands, metaphorically speaking, full of flowers from her alien garden.

Gertrude Wayne looked at the newcomers, and especially at Constance, silent and graceful in the background, with frank admiration, though she felt instinctively that both mother and daughter belonged to the class of persons that would "trouble" her. From the days of her childhood, when her parents were blundering through their first years of wealth, she had had a nostalgic love of that aristocratic spirit, embodied sometimes in persons unknown to heraldry, which sets its possessors apart in a high and disturbing solitude.

The remoter groups of women had begun already their reminiscences.

"And there was something strange about the marriage," Gertrude overheard her mother say. She turned about quickly.

"A marriage with nothing strange about it would be a unique phenomenon, mother."

"I mistrust Americans who live for years abroad," Mrs. Stilwell commented.

"Many of them can't afford to live here, espe-

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cially if they have souls to save," Gertrude answered impatiently.

"But Mrs. Valgrave's husband left her a fortune, didn't he?" Mrs. Wayne asked with her usual literalness.

"Hush! she's coming."

Eleanor had felt an increasing depression in meeting these acquaintances of her girlhood, now submerged, it would appear, in money and marriage. Throughout the greetings and introductions she was conscious of the iron grip with which small towns hold the past, as their only criterion of what may be expected of persons and things in the future. Prejudices twenty-five years old came forward to meet her. Even the small talk seemed musty. But she asked herself whether this impression were not partly subjective, born of her own desire that these people of Broadhurst should begin with her exactly where she was and with no backward glances. She alone knew what a bold challenge of destiny her return was.

The kindness in Mrs. Wayne's round, eager face seemed to offer to Eleanor a really sincere welcome, and for the sake of it she listened to a rhapsodical description of her own paintings. Gertrude stood by, her cheeks hot, but she made no effort to intersperse her mother's eloquence with wiser comments. Eleanor, understanding the delicacy of the girl's silence, looked at her with genuine interest. This attitude of respectful acquiescence with an incomplete parent was not too common in the great republic.

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Mrs. Andrew Stilwell read the paper on Modern French Art in a voice of finality. If she were conscious that there might be a margin of mystery hedging in the subject from laymen, it did not appear in her treatment of it, but for this limitation she was only partly to blame. The policy of the club was to approach all subjects from the Vedanta philosophy to germs with an assured and irrefragable calm.

Mrs. Wayne had never been conscious of this fact before, but on this occasion Eleanor's very presence made her dimly aware that the encyclopedia which hovered over the club like Mahomet's coffin might not embalm the final word on the subject. This conception at once became the matrix of another—that a discomfiture of the omnipotent Stilwell family might be achieved by a gracious and, indeed, necessary act of courtesy. At the conclusion of the paper, therefore, she reminded the club that its chief guest of the day was, herself, a portrait painter, who had lived many years abroad, and who could tell them, doubtless, much of interest concerning the subject of Modern French Art.

Constance, who was seated near her mother, touched her hand lightly and whispered, "Please do." Eleanor had a moment's impulse to decline. She was afraid of taking these people to Paris; of focusing their attention on her life there. But the subject was too great a temptation to her, and she yielded to the stronger desire of presenting it with what fidelity she could. She did not wish what she said to overshadow

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the paper, so began with a certain dryness and indifference of tone, but in a few moments she went, in spite of herself, to winding streets of old quarters, to galleries crowded with heavenly masterpieces, to untidy studios, electric with the vitalities and ambitions of children from all countries, to nights of dreaming and days of toil; but most of all to the shimmering, luring light of beauty that long ago had guided her out of this circle into lands in which her heart still dwelt. Impersonal as her speech was, it became in the very utterance an *apologia pro vita*, as if she struggled to make clear to these old acquaintances the reason why she became an exile—the reason for much more than was apparent on the surface.

They listened with varying degrees of understanding and sympathy, though in the faces of some was the vague disapproval or the slight grimace always legitimate when a richer phraseology is used than that to which they are accustomed.

Isabel Hatherley had been too busy observing the audience to listen to Eleanor, but she felt proud and important. This sister-in-law would crown the family like a tiara of gems. She wished that she had been kinder to her at that long-ago crisis, but who could have foretold that Eleanor would return wealthy and well known!

Another listener had been added meanwhile to the company. Magnus Brent stood in the doorway, his face turned toward Eleanor in complete absorption. Constance felt that he was understanding as well as

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listening, and her heart went out to him. When the meeting came to an end he made his way by exempt handshakes and mild clerical gallantries to her side.

"Constance, your mother mustn't disturb us all with the riches we've missed, or Broadhurst will become out of the question."

"But we've been missing much, too," she answered, then turned to her companion. "Cousin Magnus, are you and Miss Wayne acquainted?"

A delicate flush overspread the priest's forehead as he realized that he had overlooked Gertrude.

"Miss Wayne and I are old friends. She is one of my parishioners."

"We are nearly all members of St. Michael's," Gertrude answered, but she did not meet his eyes. She was conscious at that moment of her big frame, of what in bitter moments she called her "blowsiness."

"You are coming, are you not, to see the church this afternoon?" Magnus asked, addressing Constance. "Vespers are over, so we shall have the place to ourselves."

"I will go now, if my mother is ready." She turned and gave her hand to Gertrude, who, when they were gone, felt about her, like an ugly, lifeless landscape, the loneliness of jealousy. Magnus had never before been oblivious of her. On the contrary, he had searched her out as the one woman of his congregation who could understand and sympathize with his efforts to establish the authority of the church by clothing its forms and symbols in beauty. She had been proud of

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his recognition of her keen insight, her finer feeling. He admired her mind, and she gave him her heart, instead of taking his heart by using her mind—a blunder common to the academic, as she herself well knew.

Her mother bustled up to her, beaming.

"I scored this afternoon," she said. "It did me good to show the Stilwells just how small their puddle is."

"Yet you worked like a slave to get into it."

"Well, at least I know it's a puddle. They don't." Gertrude sighed.

"We caught a whiff of the sea this afternoon," she said.

"How did you like her daughter? The rector seems very much taken with her."

"Of course. He wouldn't care for an earthen pot, even gilded, and she—she's *Sèvres*!"

Eleanor's discriminating praise of the church and rectory was to Magnus like a long-deferred accolade sealing his achievements. It was worth while to wait for years for such appreciation of his carefully planned effects. The background fitted at least one of the visitors. It seemed to him that Constance was the first woman who had ever entered his monastic dwelling rooms without introducing a sense of discord. Perfectly feminine as she appeared, with her soft contours and sweet, eager eyes, her slim grace and girlish, unopened beauty, there was yet something about her

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that transcended sex verging upon—he was fain to believe—the angelic. He rejoiced over her as only a fastidious nature can rejoice when its dream becomes flesh.

Eleanor's worldly appearance was in piquant contrast to the interiors which she was called upon to admire. Her somewhat deprecating mood at the club had been superseded by an access of gaiety which showed itself in the tilt of her hat and the adjustment of her furs. Her figure slim, yet rounded, had a mundane charm to which even Magnus was not insensible. Yet he was not wholly willing to come under her domination. He wanted to be more sure that she was really in sympathy with his work and aspirations, and not merely offering him her foreign, plastic courtesy.

From the church they went back to the study to discuss the details of a militant St. Michael, which Eleanor had offered to paint for an altar piece.

"I warn you," she said, "that he will not be a victor—the worst of his battle will still be before him, for the greater comfort of your congregation."

"Alas! they don't even know they're in a battle. I found St. Michael's a religious club when first I took charge of it, and it is still for some of my people."

"All churches are clubs, more or less; majorities holding the same opinions," she answered indifferently.

"Ah, but we have the ancient truths," Magnus said with mild protest. "The English Church is part of the Church Catholic."

"She has a remote and wistful maternity, as if in

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the past she had done her children a wrong," Eleanor commented.

He gave her a searching look. The contradictions of her temperament puzzled him.

"Are you—pardon me—are you a member of the Roman communion?"

She shook her head.

"No, I am not. Do you wish to be sure of my fitness to paint the St. Michael?"

"No, not that," he answered hastily. "Only, I wondered——"

He hesitated, and in the pause Constance spoke.

"Cousin Magnus," she said with an accent of sweet reproach, "my mother could paint the Blessed Mary, herself."

CHAPTER IV

EDMUND was pacing up and down the drawing-room, impelled by the restlessness which he always felt when anticipating an evening with his aunt and Constance. He had little self-confidence when with them, but this increased their charm for him. The novelty of being abashed was not often experienced in Broadhurst. Their coming had separated him sharply from the dull reiterations of his old existence. He stood now on the borders of an unexplored domain.

"I am glad you are taking Constance to this dance," said Isabel, who was never sure that anything was so until she had spoken of it. "You neglected her when she first came."

Edmund made no reply. His capacity for silence when a normal person would have had an appropriate answer was for his mother an irritating mystery of his character.

"Constance should keep you about her like a moth," William Hatherley said.

"Do moths flutter about altar candles? I am giving Magnus his full chance. I think he shows a disposition to put the candle on his altar."

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"What do you mean, Edmund?" his father said impatiently.

"My dear," said Isabel in a voice of wifely triumph, "you are very short-sighted after all, if you can't see that Magnus in these few weeks has fallen in love with Constance. Naturally! He had never met a girl as beautiful or high-bred. I must say," she added generously, "she does credit to Eleanor's training."

"Magnus! I couldn't imagine Magnus in love! He is a priest first, last and all the time."

William looked his incredulity. He had always regarded Thomas's stepson as an alien in the family for a deeper than the obvious reason. Yet he was jealous of his virtues as a norm of filial character to which it was not probable that Edmund would ever attain. Magnus's rectorship of St. Michael's had increased this jealousy by placing in his hands as a priest a certain spiritual authority over the family of which he was a member. Eleanor's fortune through a marriage with Constance would make him altogether too important.

"Well, he is in love," Isabel said dryly; "and why not? There's no consanguinity as in Edmund's case." She took up her embroidery frame and began to work with swift, nervous fingers that betokened impatience of the order of things in her little world.

"I doubt if my kinswomen will remain here long enough to be disposed of by either section of the family," Edmund said, drawing a carnation from a basket of flowers and putting it in his buttonhole. He

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usually combined startling announcements with trivial actions.

"Why should they go away?" his father exclaimed, with a searching glance at him.

"Because they don't belong here, in the first place; and, incidentally, people haven't been over-civil to them."

Isabel looked up in helpless astonishment.

"What do you mean, Edmund! Everyone has called. They've been entertained more than any visitors I can remember."

"Curiosity, not kindness," her son replied curtly.

"Curiosity! What is there to know?" William Hatherley exclaimed. "Can't a woman study and live abroad—" he paused in mid-heat, for he caught his wife's apprehensive eye.

She filled the breach hurriedly.

"I don't think Mrs. Wayne has been cordial, but perhaps she has reason. You know that Magnus was very attentive to Gertrude before Constance came."

"So I observed in the summer. I thought it would go through. But Gertrude's no fool, not even when she's in love, and that's the last test."

He spoke with the flippancy which the fretfulness of his mother and the orthodoxy of his father usually aroused in him. Eleanor, coming in that moment with Constance, overheard his words.

"I am not so sure that you are right, Edmund," she said with the reflective manner that she always spread like a soft veil over differences of opinion.

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His manner melted into deference.

"Then I know I am wrong."

His aunt looked at him intently, wondering in what indifferent schools he had learned his emotional lessons. An old impression came to her with new force, that in the villages and small towns of her native land romance had for the majority a high-school quality; was directly connected with the period of giggling. Of love as a long illumination through all the phases of maturing personality; of that consciousness of sex which gives special and civilizing significance to daily living this provincial world, it would appear was not aware. It knew best the comedy elements of passion, the subterfuges of the young lovers, the teasing and gossip of the spectators; then the boisterous gaiety of the wedding, the final burst of laughter over nature's plan. But love as an exquisite accompaniment to onward treading feet, haunting even the last dim road——

Edmund saw the thoughts in her face, but, as usual, he could not read them. That he was shut out was beginning to seem to him the greatest deprivation he had known. He turned to Constance, who stood waiting by her mother's side in characteristic silence, which yet seemed more winning than speech itself, since it implied neither shyness nor lack of self-possession, rather some deep content he was fain to share.

"What do you say, little cousin? Are people wise when they love?"

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"I have no data except fairy tales," she replied demurely.

"But there's never any love-making in fairy stories," he protested. "The prince is always too busy killing dragons."

"You mustn't expect Constance to have opinions," Eleanor interposed. "Remember she is not qualified at nineteen."

"And you don't know how refreshing it is, Eleanor," Isabel said. "I heard a young thing of seventeen the other day discussing socialism. Don't let them spoil you, Constance," she added.

"I am afraid I could never be so clever as the American girls. I would like to be," she said loyally.

"You must start soon, or the child will miss the first dances. If you see Mrs. Andrew Stilwell, Eleanor, will you tell her that I should like the cake booth at the fair? I will not be put off again at the apron table."

Constance looked at her mother with smiling eyes. Her aunt was an entertaining novelty to her, as were the other members of her newly acquired family, but she was becoming fond of them all. Her readiness to adopt them was a source of much satisfaction to Eleanor.

The "dancing class" was held in a pretentious assembly room with mirror-lined walls, just now reflecting the members of Broadhurst's aristocracy of wealth, which sometimes betrayed its origin, as in the more eminent circles of a not far distant metropolis,

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by over-attention to the outward details and circumstances of its state. During the weeks that had elapsed since her return, Eleanor had watched with astonishment the clever reproductions by her townspeople of metropolitan social life. She was well aware of the adaptability of American women, but she had not realized the extent of their imitative faculty until she saw its operations against the background of her old home. They were capable of copying any gesture, of adopting any social formula. Their power of initiative seemed to her correspondingly limited, and, in consequence, their fêtes and gatherings were automatic. Their very genius for adaptation deprived them of that real form and color which can only be acquired by impulses of power working from within outward.

Concerning Eleanor herself, Broadhurst, also in a critical attitude toward the stranger within its gates, had not made up its mind, but, on the whole, sentiment was against Mrs. Valgrave, whose very graciousness had told from the first in her disfavor, as holding an apologetic element. She was, moreover, unconventional, an unconventionality of the spirit all the harder to forgive, because she conformed perfectly in dress and manner to the accepted standards. The town suspected masquerade.

When she and Constance entered the assembly room they found both Thomas and Magnus awaiting them. At the unexpected sight of the priest the softer emotions which always possessed Edmund in the company

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of his cousin gave way to the old antagonism, now sharpened by the recent conversation. The road was quite clear for Brent, this immaculate "cousin by courtesy," while before Edmund loomed the barrier of consanguinity.

Magnus came eagerly forward, signs in his face that he, too, was having his good tidings from the far country of the ideal.

"You see you have brought me to a dance; and I have not even been able to get you to week-day church."

A gleam of mischief shone for a moment in her eyes.

"I am only intermittently prayerful, and I always love to dance."

He looked down upon her with the eyes of a priest turning lover. What a joy it would be to awaken in her, little by little, a passion for himself, and through him for the church. But it was a long distance to the dim aisles and the flower-decked shrines; and she was close by, as sweet as a spring garden full of fragile flowers. Her white gown was cut low enough to reveal the delicate texture of her flesh and the soft virginal lines of her rounded, slender neck and drooping shoulders. The sense of her femininity at once troubled and enchanted him, drawn from his celibate contentments by a force of which he was not altogether patient. He had known women chiefly as church workers, in full glare of obvious goodness; and he had turned unsatisfied from them to the endless romance of the spiritual life. They had no charms to

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oppose to its beauty and mystery, its perpetual lure of the inaccessible. Now beauty and mystery had become flesh. Was this what had gleamed milk-white in the shadows of St. Anthony's cave? He regretted the simile in the moment of its conception; yet her very youth and innocence had a dynamic force. He saw that he would gradually yield to it, but, true to his ruling passion, he should erect crosses on the road.

Edmund came up at that moment to claim her, and they glided away, Constance with a pretty gesture of unconscious coquetry. Magnus felt a pang of jealousy. He had always judged his stepcousin, not by Edmund's laws of character, but by certain well-defined ideals of his own. He looked upon him as unregenerate, in no sense a companion for a girl of Constance's pure and dainty spirit. He turned to Eleanor, whose eyes were following her daughter.

"When are you coming to us? My father and I are growing impatient."

"We shall come soon. We could not leave earlier," she replied.

"They are to be envied. It is especially good for Edmund to have you there."

"Edmund only needs something to do," Eleanor commented.

"He could have plenty to do," Thomas said, coming up at that moment, "if he'd stick to business. I do my work in the office, and his, too."

The impatient note in his voice drew Eleanor's attention. She turned and saw, as if for the first time,

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his meager figure, dulled in its outlines by the passage of monotonous years; the drooping lines of the mouth, the general appearance of a man who is enveloped in the dullness of subordination without hope. As she looked, there flashed across her mind the image of this brother as he was in his early twenties, gentle, shy, bookish, full of sympathy for her moods, yet lacking the force and experience to guide her. He had dreamed then of specializing for a professorship, but William's authority had blocked his path, and he had gradually consented to another's disposition of his destiny. A longing awoke in her to liberate him if she could.

"My father has much to bear," Magnus said apologetically.

"You knew that before you went away, didn't you, Nell."

Her face grew sad.

"I had hoped for a changed situation."

"I am glad that you at least are free—that you have your fortune, your independence," Thomas said fervently.

Magnus turned to speak to someone. When he had moved away, she said in a low voice:

"My fortune seems to be doing the work of many tears of repentance."

"No," her brother said eagerly. "It is you, yourself. Don't you realize that the years have enriched you?"

"You mean that!"

"I mean it, indeed."

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"Even admitting, even knowing the source of my inspiration, of what you long ago among yourselves agreed to call—damnable?"

Thomas hesitated.

"You don't defend—" he began.

"I defend nothing. I conquered much, the fear of myself, the fear of the world, most of all the fear of the child."

"You feared her," he whispered.

"I am always in fear of her innocence, yet that is of my making. I labored for it, I prayed for it, I made bargains with God for it."

Thomas's timid soul shrank from the intensity of her look and voice.

"What do you mean, Eleanor?" he asked, as if he spoke to someone confused by fever.

"I mean I'm as much of a bargainer with Deity as William, where Constance is concerned," she answered. "I want her to believe in me forever and ever."

Thomas cast an anxious glance at her. Long dwelling in a conventional atmosphere had ill-prepared him for the chalybeate taste of Eleanor's confessions.

"Come into this recess behind these palms. You are pale, dear." His voice was tender and comforting. Its intonation brought up a vision of the past: herself a little forlorn, motherless child of five years, sobbing out her heart in a corner of the old garden over some tragedy of broken playthings, and Thomas trying awkwardly to soothe her.

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"They could not hear us through the music," she answered; but she followed him and took the chair he drew up for her.

"Forget everything," he said. "You are at home now."

"My home is a grave over which I have been more than once obliged to dance."

He was silent, afraid to put his lips to the cup she offered. He was relieved to see Magnus approaching, accompanied by Francis Bradmore, the one man in Broadhurst Thomas thought suitable to mate with Eleanor. Marriage after all would prove the densest screen between her and the unreconciled forces of the past.

CHAPTER V

ELEANOR found in Francis Bradmore a fair type of the American of good family who knows the world yet clings to his native heath, exercising thereon the sturdy pastoral virtues. Bradmore possessed the cosmopolitanism of a kindly and liberal spirit, but he frankly preferred an apple orchard in his own country to an Italian garden. He lived for the most part in the solitude of his farm, riding over his fields accompanied by numerous dogs, or conducting experiments in agriculture, or smoking and reading in the bachelor cosiness of his rooms. From time to time he gave little dinners to his men friends, at which wines of grand-paternal cellarage were offered.

He had never been on intimate terms with the Hatherley family, but his introduction to Eleanor made him eager to proffer certain courtesies to her kinsfolk. About a fortnight after the dance Edmund and Magnus were both to be his guests one evening, an unusual circumstance, for the cousins moved, as a rule, in different circles.

The third guest was an artist from New York, Ward Remling, a landscape painter who had the reputation of talking like a genius when the wine was suffi-

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ciently old. Remling amused Bradmore, who never took him quite seriously. He stood now before the fireplace, one negligent arm on the chimney-piece, one hand caressing a Great Dane.

"Did you say that you expected a clergyman this evening?"

"The rector of the Episcopal Church here. You needn't look alarmed. Brent's an easy fellow—too intent on his own point of view to bother much about yours."

"So? That's reassuring; though, to tell the truth, the clergy are not lagging these days, at least in New York. One of them remarked to me at a reception the other evening that he thought true charity was founded on a belief in evolution which makes final judgments about anything impossible. What do you think of that?" Remling ended triumphantly.

"Good enough! but," he added, a smile passing over his face, "you'd better not test Mr. Brent on such subjects. I imagine he knows the church fathers more thoroughly than Darwin. By the way, are you exhibiting anything?"

"One or two trifles. I've lacked sources of enthusiasm lately."

At this moment Magnus and Edmund were announced. Their host introduced Remling, who glanced rather nervously at the priest. Magnus, who always enjoyed Bradmore's easy hospitality, looked as if he were anticipating a good evening. He was glad there were no women present. Since Constance's

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arrival he had been rather impatient of the feminine contingent in his congregation.

The four men were soon seated about the circular dinner table, which, in its moon of soft candle light, had that appearance of being placed entirely out of the work-a-day world which all proper dinner tables should have. The scent of wine, of flowers, of burning wood filled the dim air pleasantly.

"You should be prior of a monastery for the promotion of material delights," Magnus said to his host.

"I have always believed that the epicureans had the right of it," Remling remarked, toying with his bit of fish. "It is so much harder to use this world's delights skillfully than to do without them altogether."

"I suppose that's the trouble with us Americans," Edmund commented. "We run everything into the ground."

"Yes," Bradmore said. "We squeeze the breath out of our very pleasures."

"And out of our principles, too, sometimes," Remling added. "Did you read about yesterday's doings in Congress?"

The talk drifted into politics, but chiefly those of a lazy Utopian character. As the dinner progressed and the wines circulated, it became more difficult for three of the party, at least, to care very much which way the world wagged. Magnus drank little wine, but even he felt a dreamy insouciance creep over him, an absolute indifference as to whether St. Andrew's Guild met on the morrow or not. Edmund, always in a state of

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accessibility on social occasions, allowed the visitations of whatever gods were searching for him. He at last proposed a toast, "Woman, the Undivined!" for through the grape-purple shadows, now clouding with their infinite comfort the harsh outlines of the prosaic, looked in upon him the faces of the first women whom the young insolence of his masculinity could not explain away.

Remling drank it with enthusiasm. Bradmore, whose thoughts for the moment were elsewhere, turned to Magnus.

"How is Mrs. Valgrave? Does she intend to remain long in Broadhurst—if I may ask?"

"We all hope so," Magnus replied fervently.

"Broadhurst would be grateful," Bradmore said gallantly. "A lady as charming as Mrs. Valgrave is like good news from a far country."

"What far country?" Remling asked, looking a little dazed.

"Paris, of course," Bradmore answered.

"*Et in Arcadia, ego*," Remling murmured. "Let's all go back there. Why—why do we linger in Egypt—slaves to the dollar?"

"You should know Mrs. Valgrave, Remling; you, a painter," his host said.

"Valgrave—not Eleanor Valgrave!"

He put down his wine glass, gazing at Bradmore. Edmund frowned slightly, but Magnus looked merely interested. Bradmore, conscious of he knew not what approaching awkwardness, hastened to say:

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"The well-known portrait painter, who is honoring Broadhurst now with her presence."

Remling gave a little start.

"Mrs. Valgrave—in Broadhurst! It isn't possible!"

"You think no one can ever tear themselves away from Paris," Bradmore said hurriedly. "Mr. Brent and Mr. Hatherley are nearly related to Mrs. Valgrave. She is visiting her people here."

"Oh, really—delightful!" Remling said with visible embarrassment. Edmund's frown deepened, but Magnus was aware of nothing unusual. He was not sufficiently interested in mundane matters to be a keen observer.

"I'm—I'm familiar with Mrs. Valgrave's work," he went on. "Strong—lots of dash—she never dips her brush in sirup."

Edmund leaned forward.

"Do you know many people in Paris?" he asked.

"I—I can't say I do."

Bradmore, still conscious of an awkwardness, though ignorant of its cause, caught Remling's eye at that moment. The host's expression said as plainly as words, "For heaven's sake change the subject—talk any nonsense, but change it." Remling obeyed.

"I never had my fill of the gay city. It's the only city in the world where they fully appreciate that the mystery of sex is the mystery of the universe."

The priest turned clear blue eyes of inquiry upon the painter, yet half-fearful of some pagan heterodoxy referring all ethics to the primitive forces of the world.

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His imagination was in that delicately responsive state, always induced by incipient romance, which can mirror every theory of emotion at every stage of the world's progress. Women in relation to hermits and saints, a troubling echo of earthly joy, now became, in this genial hour, the nymphs, beloved of the Greeks. Constance moved before him crowned with cyclamen flowers and violets, one with the sunlight, and the moonlight, and the rush of woodland waters.

"And what do you mean by that?" asked Bradmore, who wished to close the door tightly on the previous topic.

"I mean, that all the bliss and all the pain of the world comes from two trying to become one. We are all in love with oneness, yet we continue in the sin of Eden, the sin of duality."

Magnus leaned forward.

"Please explain."

"If you can, Remling," Bradmore said, with a twinkle in his eye. "And put it plainly. We are not Oriental mystics."

"I mean that when Adam and Eve found they were two, instead of one, then all the trouble began. The first trouble was clothes, the symbol of their duality. Before that, man, wife, and creator were all one. Afterward the leaf-apron became the petticoat; the petticoat became the arbiter of man's destiny instead of his righteous God."

Edmund's face expressed the keenest interest. He had forgotten his annoyance.

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"Why is woman the eternal enigma?" he said eagerly.

"Because she's closer to the spiritual forces of the world which are as yet obscure. Mr. Hatherley, if you wish to know the enigma, woman, go out and follow the wind where it bloweth."

"Dogs and horses for companionship, and women for pipe-dreams," Bradmore said, turning to the priest.

Magnus smiled indulgently. He had taken just enough wine to be charitable.

"I would rather believe she was human nature's daily food."

"Romance thrives on mystery and denial," Remling objected.

Bradmore feared a return to dangerous ground, but Edmund was apparently thirsty for new doctrine.

"You can't have it in marriage, then?" he questioned.

"Not often," Remling answered with a sigh. He was reaching the sentimental stage. "Most women—God bless them—think that the ring and the marriage service have made them one with their husbands—strange error! The wise matron knows that the task is never finished, for only infinity satisfies. Give me the coquette—that the very flutter of her ribbons may signal me to the ancient paradise."

Magnus looked unutterable things. Bradmore thought of Eleanor Valgrave, and wondered what Remling would have said of her had he not been checked.

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"Go on," urged the infatuated Edmund. The past weeks had prepared him for such occult teaching.

"I have nothing further to say, except that all married women should learn to make their faith and goodness as fascinating and mysterious as stolen sweets are popularly supposed to be. The wife-mistress would be the supreme treasure. Where is she to be found?"

He looked appealingly at his audience.

"You are pre-supposing," Magnus said, "that all men are of animal nature." He was becoming impatient of this monologue drawn from the wine glass.

"On the contrary, I pre-suppose that they have a divine nature latent somewhere," said Remling.

Magnus's disturbance of mind over these opinions was but temporary. Most artists, he reflected, had strange views of life and of the constitution of the universe. Remling's wine-begotten eloquence was not to be taken seriously.

To Edmund it came with something of the authority of a new gospel. Like many men, he had unconsciously founded his conceptions of women on the type of his own mother. Her querulous petting and restless anxieties would have made a palace seem narrow. Were there, indeed, women whose love and understanding could turn a hut into a splendor of spaciousness! If so, it behooved a man to call for his horse and spurs, and gay, knightly armor. He was so full of the subject that he was willing even to talk to Magnus as the two walked back to the town together toward midnight. And when he parted from the priest

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he felt the necessity of seeking his family, and compelling them to listen to strange doctrine. By happy circumstance they were still together in the drawing room, his father and mother, his aunt and Constance. Into this group Edmund came with the solemn confidence of the inspired man ; prepared to interpret to the best of his ability the dogma of woman's obligation to hide herself within the iridescent mists which rise beyond the borders of the world.

CHAPTER VI

ISABEL'S inadequate maternity was written on her quivering features as she looked helplessly toward the doorway through which had just passed her husband and Edmund, the latter still discoursing upon vast topics. Eleanor, moved with sincere sympathy, signed to Constance to leave the room. When Isabel found herself alone with her sister-in-law her tears began to flow.

"It is—it is disgraceful!" she sobbed out, "to come in here when he——"

"But he did nothing very bad," Eleanor said soothingly. "He only talked too well."

"If he could only talk so when he——" she paused. "I give dinners, my dear, and he scarcely opens his lips. He doesn't seem to care for the nice girls and their mothers that I invite here. He is a perfect failure socially, unless he's doing dreadful things."

Eleanor turned her head to hide a smile.

"But whatever his faults, he's lovable. He'll come through some day and leave these things behind."

Isabel withdrew her handkerchief and turned plaintive red eyes upon her sister-in-law.

"What makes you think so?" she asked, a note of resentment in her tearful voice.

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"Because there's so much good in him. He's sound at heart."

"How do you know? Are you trying to excuse him?"

"Yes, I am. Don't reproach him to-morrow. Talk it out as man to man—and don't weep."

Isabel began to cry again.

"I try to make home happy for him. I go to the kitchen myself and cook certain things because he likes them just that way."

Eleanor made no answer, lest her stirred-up sense of humor should find inappropriate outlet. But it played after all only with the superficial aspects of the situation. In her heart she felt pity for Isabel, groping in the fog of her helplessness; and sympathy for Edmund, seeking the dreams of the flesh rather than remain unvisited by visions.

"I know you've been good to him, perhaps too good," she said gently. "We agonize over them so, and pray over them, and hold our breath lest they stumble. Then some day a light breaks for them that we didn't set, that no human hand set. He'll see it, and you'll be comforted."

Her accustomed manner of a somewhat indifferent worldliness had dropped from her. Isabel, drawn for a moment from her trouble, regarded her curiously. What right had Eleanor to talk with authority of prayer and growth in goodness—to talk to her who had been a faithful wife and mother! The suffering in her heart centered to a sting.

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"What you say would comfort me more—if you were a church member."

The light faded from Eleanor's eyes. It was the first reference to a specter of which both were always conscious, the first outbreak of the moral scorn to which Isabel, without doubt, possessed her full right. This weak mother, this wife without significance, had yet her premiership founded on indisputable facts.

Isabel's bravado was of short duration. Eleanor's silence crushed it at last into stammering apology.

"But you—you are not a church member," she said helplessly.

"No, I am not. You are right, perhaps, in mistrusting what is not *ex cathedra*."

She went upstairs to her daughter timidly. After the first sharp pain it mattered little what Isabel thought or felt, a woman atrophied by her stock of virtues into a mere echo of conventionality; but Constance's attitude toward the backsliding of others was of crucial importance.

On the landing she met her brother. His annoyance still stiffened his features. Eleanor could remember that look years ago, when she had mortified him by some childish prank. The thought came to her that William, all his life, had been surrounded and hampered by temperaments whom he could neither understand nor direct, his blamelessness always impeached vicariously. She wondered if he would have been more mellow if he had had people about him sharing his own tastes and ideas. She had never believed much

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in the ripening qualities of stinging sleet, or of rough winds.

She paused before him, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Scold me instead."

Her voice was wistful. He looked down upon her doubtfully, fearful of yielding to a charm in her which might confuse his judgment.

"I ended my scoldings of you long ago. They were useless, anyway."

"I went my own gait, you mean, William, in spite of you."

"You know that you did."

"Is it so terrible to you?"

He avoided her eyes.

"It ought to be. It was before you came back."

"Perhaps I ought to go away again—to insure your being just."

The accent of bitterness in her voice was painful to him. Affection for her strove with his desire of self-justification.

"I am only too glad to have you here. You are a living refutation of the rumors I've spent twenty years in ignoring."

"Poor William!"

She pondered a moment.

"You've had to lie, too."

He winced. Eleanor's command of Anglo-Saxon had embarrassed him on more than one occasion.

"Yes," he said heavily; "I've had to do violence to

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my conscience many times. I hope the Lord will forgive me!"

"My lies have been for my daughter, and I am not asking Heaven to forgive me, since I still tell them—that's the difference between us!"

"You've never let me forget the difference between us." His face hardened again. Their genius for fretting each other was the only clear issue of this, their first intimate interview. She made no answer, but turned slowly away; then impulsively turned back.

"Forgive me, Will! I didn't mean to hurt you, but you don't understand. You seem to think I've plucked flowers all my life. I did have what I wanted—but I paid for it."

"Are you sorry?" he asked in a searching voice.

She shook her head.

"Do you mean, do I repent?"

"Yes—just that."

"No, I do not," she answered slowly. "If I repented I should acknowledge that I am not the woman that Constance loves—and I am that! She'd feel it if I were not!"

"Then she's your righteousness."

"She's everything." She put her fingers to her lips.

"Oh, we mustn't talk. Read me through her!"

"I'll try to," he answered wearily. He went on down the stairs.

She hurried after him, bent her slight, graceful figure toward him.

"Isabel's alone, and not happy," she whispered.

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"Try to distract her mind. Tell her you'll get her the bracelet she has been talking of."

He turned and caught her wrist in a tight grasp.

"What's to take the place of gauds with me!"

"You have the mills," she answered.

To this he made no reply, believing he heard irony in her voice.

She found Constance seated in childish fashion on the hearth-rug, her brown hair hanging over her shoulders. Her attitude was a temptation for maternal petting; and Eleanor was of the class of mothers who always see the baby in their children. She knelt down by her, pressing her cheek against her cheek for a moment.

"Your mother wants to know what you are thinking, sweetheart."

Constance opened her arms.

"I've been wishing you'd come. You make me forget unpleasant things."

"You mean the scene just over?"

"Yes," she mused a moment. "I am afraid I shall not feel the same toward Edmund again."

"Oh, my dear, isn't that harsh?"

"It's just."

Her usually sweet voice held an inflexible note.

"But suppose Edmund had something in his nature that made it hard for him to be—well, like Magnus, for instance. Don't you know there are days when you, yourself, are like a little wild thing—my gypsy-child?"

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"Yes, I do know," Constance admitted; "but when I feel that way I go out into the sunshine and sing, or walk miles. I am quite acceptable, and," she added with a quiver of a smile, "in perfect taste."

She nestled her head against her mother's breast. Eleanor sat in a tense attitude, her lips pressed together, a haggard look in her eyes. It seemed to her that moment that all her attempts to miraculize her life into a haven of unreality for Constance, must by some bitter irony, fail.

"You are a very little child," she said gently. "Wait until life grows wider about you, until you judge. No, then you will not judge, knowing that no human eye can grasp the whole pattern."

Constance shook her head.

"It isn't judgment—it's the way I feel. You remember the day in Rouen, when someone threw waste water from a door and drenched me, passing by? I feel as I did then—sick and creepy all over."

Eleanor made no reply. She had a vision of a little girl in a white frock tripping by her side through the old streets of Rouen; then the accident, and the child's imploring, upward look at her mother. She could not get home fast enough, could not be stripped quickly enough of her clothes and bathed and soothed.

"You remember, mother?"

"Oh, yes, yes. Don't let's talk any more; I'm tired. I'm dreadfully tired."

She rose impatiently, and began moving about, tak-



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ing the combs from her hair with quick, nervous movements. In a moment Constance was all solicitude.

"I haven't tired you, mother?"

"Not you—but everything tires me. It will be different when these visits are over—when we're in our own little nest," she added in a softer voice.

Constance clung to her, conscious of the play of lightning from clouds below the horizon. Her mother drew aside the embracing arms.

"Good night—forget everything."

Eleanor undressed, but sleep was out of the question. She tried to read, but her mind continually wandered. The events of the evening had brought sharply to her the realization of how much she depended upon Constance to effect reunion with her kinsfolk, and beyond them, with the community of Broadhurst, and how little upon her own endeavors, which seemed continually rendered sterile by the intervening experiences of her exile. In the family life, on social occasions, even at Magnus's interminable imitations of the services of the Latin Church, the ghosts of revolt and longing haunted her, together with a fear of self-betrayal. She had constantly the sensation of a smuggler, introducing into a highly respectable community bales of suspiciously beautiful goods. She felt the unspoken question—where and how had she obtained them?

She rose at last, and went into her daughter's room. The slender figure on the bed, in its perfect repose,

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might have served a painter for the dream of St. Ursula.

“Constance!”

The girl opened her eyes, then with a smile of recognition—for her mother came often to her bedside in this way—put out her arms and drew her down. For a while there was silence. Then Eleanor spoke falteringly:

“Suppose, dearest, your own mother should be wicked—Oh, just suppose it!”

Constance’s soft laughter was her only reply.

CHAPTER VII

ISABEL'S resentment of her sister-in-law's assumption of the prerogatives of the righteous was not favorable to her receiving Edmund in a tolerant spirit. She met him next day with many reproaches. He listened patiently, but said nothing, his somewhat slipshod category of women dividing them into those whom it was futile to answer, and those who might profit by replies. In the former class he placed his mother, so he continued to gaze in gloomy silence through the library windows at a sodden rain of early March. He knew that like the rain, his mother's complaining would wear itself out at last, but the process was, nevertheless, dreary.

"I don't wonder Constance prefers Magnus to you," she finished. "You neglect every surface attraction, and he never forgets one."

Edmund winced.

"Leave Constance out of the question. She was never in it for me."

"She was—for your father."

"I fear he has lost his last chance to make capital out of me."

"You don't accuse your father—" Isabel began angrily.

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"He is not judging by my limited observation, a romantic old gentleman."

The lines of disapproval deepening on his mother's face—her helpless affection for him could only disapprove—he deemed it best to withdraw. Curiosity filled him to learn if his little cousin would show by her manner that she was conscious of a gulf between them. He was passionately eager that she should think well of him.

He went to his aunt's rooms to proffer apologies for his conduct of the evening. He found her reading in front of the open fire. As usual, the very sight of her took him out of a meaner world into fair and pleasant places.

She held out her hand to him.

He drew back.

"I must say first, how sorry I am about last evening. I hate most that Constance should have heard my brilliant oratory—and on such a topic."

"It was not the best thing. She is an idealist naturally at her age, and idealists are seldom just."

"It's good you can be merciful. I don't know whether you can understand, but there are times when it is such a temptation to forget my failures. A few glasses of wine—and I'm a genius, an ornament to my race, a family blessing, an unlimited man."

"I quite understand. The spirit is set free. We are done with conjecture—we know!

He looked at her admiringly.

"You are wonderful!"

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She smiled.

"Wine is not the only intoxicant. Who did you say this propounder of strange doctrine was?"

"The landscape artist, Ward Remling."

"I have heard of him."

He was silent for a while; then he said with a note of apology in his voice:

"I don't want to shift the blame of my sins to other people's shoulders, but I think things might have been different if father had let me go to sea, as I wanted to when I was eighteen. He shipped me off to Harvard instead, and spent ten thousand dollars on me, when I wasn't worth spending ten cents on for a university degree. Then he brought me back to the mills and told me to 'saw wood.' I hate office work. I hate trade. I hate applying screws to squeeze the last penny out of a business deal. I sometimes think I'll cut loose even now."

"What would you do?"

"God knows!"

"I played truant myself years ago. I understand your feeling. But try it a while longer. Show you can succeed here before you ask for your liberty."

This platitude of good advice became in her lips a novel message.

"I wish that you had always been here," he said. "All that is needed to save your soul sometimes is one congenial person. You won't leave us?" he added pleadingly.

He held out his hand, and she took it in a firm

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grasp, in a sudden reaction of hope from the desolation of the night before. It seemed to her that in his undeveloped but honest soul she had at last found a link for that union with her own people, which through all the mazes of her life she had, after all, fervently desired.

When he had left her, she did not resume her reading, absorbed in the kind of speculation which is as much biased by experience as by the lack of it. Why, she asked herself, should family life so often kill the poetical and romantic elements of emotion, leaving only the dustiness of a business or legal proposition? Why should she and Edmund be wanderers at heart? The question remained unanswered, as in those far-off days, before love had swept her into a deep and blissful silence.

CHAPTER VIII

THE model for the St. Michael had not been chosen, chiefly because Eleanor had delayed beginning the work in William's house. She was not of the temperament to do successful work under any conditions, but was forced to regard the clouds even at the risk of neither sowing nor reaping. The painting was an experiment which she hesitated to commence, doubting, despite Constance's belief in her, her ability to create a religious picture. Modern religious art, as a whole, had always seemed to her a curious mixture of impiety, feebleness and sentimentality, and she feared these pitfalls for her own skeptical spirit. She longed to believe, at least for the time of the task, in the bright warrior-angel.

One afternoon when Constance had gone for a drive with Magnus, Eleanor started to walk to a farm in the hills, whose owner, Magnus thought, might serve as a model for the St. Michael. At the gate of the carriage drive she met Francis Bradmore, and learning her project he asked if he might not accompany her. She assented gladly, for she had genuine pleasure in his friendship, which had been established since the hour of their first meeting. His personality, his points

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of view, everything about him confirmed her theory that American men, as a whole, were not to be excelled by any on the planet.

"You say you know this young farmer," she said, as they started off at a brisk pace.

"Sutro? Quite well. It's a bit of a walk to his farm, and up-hill all the way. Do you think you can do it?"

"I shall enjoy it. I had forgotten how beautiful spring is here. Look at that little white birch dressed in pale-green, and gay as a *débutante*."

"You are fond of outdoor life."

"I have always loved it," she answered, "and continued to live in cities."

"City-dwellers at least get contrast. But I'm long past the necessity of putting pepper on my tongue to enjoy more the taste of claret. I begrudge going down for a week of opera or the theater. To watch things grow is more absorbing than any problem play."

She laughed.

"O, problem plays! It's carrying coals to Newcastle to see one. Did you always like the country so much?"

"I'm a born farmer. I was educated for the law and I practiced some years, but when my father died I returned to the homestead and settled down to the work I love best."

"They tell me you've made some very useful discoveries: that you carry on experiments in the most approved scientific fashion."

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He looked at her shyly. He wanted to be sure of her sympathy before telling her too much of the interests nearest his heart. She seemed to read his thoughts.

"I wish you would take me over your farm. I imagine you see miracles where other men see crops."

"Well, I do think the soil more than something to speculate on. I've often wondered what moral change would take place in these brokers if they could be captured and set to watch a wheatfield growing from the time the first thin green blades poke out, to the harvest. They'd be more use, many of them, scaring crows than gambling with stocks."

"I see you are a partisan."

"You can't live in New York without making up your mind on certain subjects. Did you stop there on your way to Broadhurst?"

"No; I didn't wish Constance to form her first ideas of this country from New York. It's like a kingdom in the midst of a republic."

After a mile or so of brisk walking they reached a height commanding a view of the valley, of the opposite hills, and of the mountains beyond, clear, cool lines of blue, fold against fold. Heavy masses of gray rain clouds were rolling southward, but toward the north, above the distant peaks, was a strip of cold, blue sky, remote and austere, yet with a heavenly promise in its depths. The enveloping silence was more deeply emphasized by the movement of the wind in the pines above them, trees so dark and gnarled and

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massive that they appeared to have entered into an arboreal eternity. The smell of the awakening earth was borne upon the breeze bringing suggestions of damp green meadows and the flower-bedecked banks of loud-voiced brooks.

"Tell me of this young man," Eleanor said. "Would he serve for a fighting St. Michael?"

"James Sutro has striven with the forces of nature, I imagine, more than with the powers of evil. Yes, I think he might serve. He has a kind of distinction about him that some men get from a life on the soil. He is by no means a rustic, however. He's well educated, reads a great deal, and has a penchant for social economics."

"I'm afraid he'll never consent to pose. Ah, what a wonderful situation!"

They were now approaching the summit of the ridge on which the farm stood. From every side of the gray group of buildings the land sloped away in vast curves that deepened to valleys and rose again, far off, in the blue and amethyst of rolling ample hills—a triumphant perspective. Eleanor drew a glad breath.

"Great view!" her companion commented. "And the house doesn't jar."

She turned to look at the long, low building, with its shingled walls, hip-roof, and little-paned windows, like so many friendly eyes overlooking the landscape. There was a solitariness in its aspect which not even the neighborhood of the big, comfortable barn could

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remove. It suggested to Eleanor nights of intense quiet, and days in a deep hush of sunshine or muffling snows.

"I like it so much. I must have seen the place when a girl, but I don't remember it. Wait—let me get Magnus's letter of introduction. I must ask this as a great favor."

"Here comes your model."

Down the walk toward them came an erect, broad-shouldered figure which had never, it seemed, bowed to the elements. Eleanor, as she looked into the young man's face, saw what Magnus meant. The well-defined features had an intensity of expression which revealed the militant spirit. Perhaps on these rugged hills the pastoral existence was, perforce, a battle.

Eleanor introduced herself, and briefly explained her errand, at the same time giving Sutro the letter. He glanced hastily over it, then addressed his visitors.

"Mr. Brent is very kind," he said with quiet emphasis, "but I do not think I am the person to do this."

Bradmore, slightly embarrassed, turned toward Eleanor. She was silent. An expression almost child-like in its disappointment clouded her face. Sutro, standing awkwardly before her, saw it, and shifted his weight from one foot to another with an uneasy consciousness of somehow being in the wrong.

"Won't—won't you come in and rest yourselves?" he said.

"Thank you very much—I am tired."

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She spoke with a grateful softness that thrilled the young farmer, used to harsh or nasal voices. As they went up the path she walked a little ahead of him. His clear blue eyes were fixed upon her wonderingly.

Bradmore held his peace, but his mind was concentrated on the little scene with an intensity which sought to go far below the surface. He had not questioned Remling, after the dinner, concerning Mrs. Valgrave, but a letter received that morning from the artist had again awakened his curiosity, tempered and dignified, however, by his strong personal liking.

Sutro led his visitors into a large, low-ceiled room, sparsely furnished with heavy pieces of old mahogany. Eleanor noticed a case of books which had the live look of volumes often handled. A wood fire was burning on the hearth.

Eleanor seated herself near it, and asked permission to lay aside her coat. Her manner, deferential and gentle, was adding little by little to Sutro's discomfort. He stood in a hesitating attitude by the fireplace, while Bradmore took the heavy coat from Eleanor's shoulders. She stood revealed in a gown which threw into relief the clear lines of her face, and emphasized the slender perfection of her figure. A gardenia was fastened in her dress; it seemed to one of the men, at least, in its delicate colorless beauty, to be symbolic of her. Its keen perfume filled the warm air, and wove a web of attraction about Sutro. He was beginning to feel that he had been abrupt and hasty—perhaps

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refused an honor. He gazed as if fascinated at the flower, then at a large moonstone on one of Eleanor's fingers.

Bradmore saw his melting mood and interposed.

"It's only another way, Sutro, of having your portrait painted by Mrs. Valgrave, a distinction anyone would covet. Only there's no danger in this case of a revelation of character. For from the very beginning, you'd be archangelic."

Then Sutro smiled. The transformation in his face was like the sweeping of sunlight over some high wind-beaten spot.

"I didn't mean to be short with you, ma'am, but it seems foolish to me—not your doing it, but my being in such a picture."

"I understand perfectly. I know how you feel," Eleanor said, putting a conscious seduction in her voice and manner. That this young farmer had refused her request made her all the more eager to bend him to her will.

"But I'll think it over," he conceded. "If I'm not too busy, I might—Oh, come in, mother."

A woman stood in the doorway, thin, bright-eyed, with the timid manner of a little wood-animal. Sutro went to her and led her forward.

Eleanor seized this psychological moment to press her request.

"You say that it is to go over the communion-table at the church? I don't know as James ought to refuse—" she turned to her son—"I never had a good

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likeness of you." Her voice trembled a little between shyness and the force of her desire.

"You want me to, mother?" he said tenderly.

She nodded, twisting her apron about her roughened fingers.

"I guess I'll have to, then."

"I'll make him your son first of all," Eleanor said impulsively. "The angel will be only a matter of wings and sword."

When Bradmore returned home he thrust aside certain insinuating cold noses and welcoming paws, and sat down to read again Remling's letter:

"I met Thornton, the caricaturist, the other day, and in some way or other, I spoke of the fascinating Mrs. Valgrave, who had summoned our mutual friend Bradmore from bucolic joys to the tribunal of Woman. It seems that he had known her in Paris, and he had—theories. You know that Thornton does not believe in the social laws governing marriage, and I think, from what he said, that he wanted to prove some pet theory by Mrs. Valgrave's experience. She was so happy and charming that he wanted to be quite sure she had no right to be, according to the moralists; but everything was vague, so he could not quote her case in the delightful book he is preparing on 'The Chosen Women.'"

Bradmore frowned. After a moment's hesitation he tore the letter up and threw it into the fire.

CHAPTER IX

FOR certain temperaments romance is a form of troubling from which, as from a fever, they can only pray to be delivered. They are equal to the requirements of friendship, its trusts, its warm silences, its solid sympathies, like rock under the flow of years. But love ensnares their imperfections by its emphasis on personal desire.

Since the coming of Constance Valgrave to Broadhurst, Gertrude Wayne had been in the grip of conflicting emotions. She wanted sincerely to reconcile herself to changed conditions, but from dark places of her nature came a harsh din of protest that drowned the tenderer chords.

She was seated one day in her room, trying to fix her mind on a report for some guild meeting, when her mother rustled in. Blooming Mrs. Wayne had always the appearance of a woman whose lingerie is full of pale-pink ribbons; and her silk petticoats whispered innocent seduction meant for the chaste ears of Mr. Wayne, whose legal right it was to provide them.

"Aren't you going with me?" she asked reproachfully.

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"No, I'm not. I'm sick of meeting the same people everywhere. I should like to make the acquaintance of the blacksmith, or some of the farmers up in the hills."

Her mother sat down and regarded her attentively.

"If you keep out of things much more, people 'll begin to talk. They'll say you're suffering a disappointment."

"Well, they'll be right for once."

"I wish the Valgraves had stayed in Paris," her mother blurted out.

"They are not responsible."

"Before they came he certainly gave you cause to think——"

Gertrude's face stiffened.

"He gave me cause to think nothing."

"Oh, I know," Mrs. Wayne fretted. "He did and he didn't; he would and wouldn't. All the men are like that nowadays. When I was a girl a young man knew what he wanted—and took it."

"In the manner of the Rape of the Sabines, I suppose," Gertrude said musingly. "A primitive method, but with advantages. It saves the woman anxiety. Did father seize upon you?"

"He had to; there were so many after me," Mrs. Wayne purred proudly. "You can't realize, Gertrude, what it is to have a half-a-dozen men in love with you, because you've been to college. And if they were, you'd analyze them so that they'd all fade away like phantoms. You think too much. In my time, I'd put a pink bow in my hair, and I'd have been sweet

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to someone else—if only to make number one jealous.”

“Jealous! When a man possesses an orchid he doesn’t care who picks the geranium.”

“You mean Constance Valgrave’s an orchid.”

“That—and much more.”

“She looks happier since they’ve gone to the rectory,” Mrs. Wayne ruminated. “I don’t suppose there’s a doubt that she and Mr. Brent will become engaged, and then they’ll leave St. Michael’s—what’s the matter, are you cold?”

“No.”

“The fortune will come in good. They’ll be free of the other house.”

Gertrude said nothing.

“Well, I’m going on. I promised to pour. If you take my advice, you’ll go out for a breath of air. It’s a beautiful day.”

“Good-bye, mummie. You look younger than I do.”

When her mother was gone, Gertrude tried to settle again to her work, but the rows of figures kept reminding her that her two and two made five. She rose impatiently at last and began to pace the floor of her room. Its elaborate and costly furniture suddenly seemed to her silly and vacuous. Would she be staring at that array of silver on her toilet table ten years from now!

“I’ll go away and work—work, so that I can’t think.” She wished that she had been allowed to

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study nursing, as she had begged to do after leaving college. But her mother had put obstacles in her way, her chief objection being that the family dignity would be lowered by Gertrude's embracing such a profession. Efforts to employ her energy in other directions had been met by maternal prejudices. Wearied of combatting them, she had resigned herself to the round of Broadhurst life—splendidly broken at last by the coming of Magnus Brent from a western parish to assume in his birthplace the rectorship of St. Michael's. His fastidiousness, his zeal, his aloofness, as of one secretly set apart, appealed to her imagination; his passion for work to her restless energy. She put her talents at his service. Her reward had been his genuine admiration of what she was able to accomplish, and, she had believed in her exalted moments, something tenderer than admiration.

Well, work might be again her salvation. Meanwhile she must not play the coward. When you are *in extremis* is the moment to act as if the gift of immortality had been bestowed upon you.

An hour later she left the house gowned to combat sorrow, the pink bow, figuratively speaking, in her hair. She had not gone far when she met Edmund Hatherley. His face was flushed, and his eyes looked dull and uncertain. Pity for him welled up in her, for by the light of her own trouble she saw that he, too, was somehow failing to make terms with existence. She stopped him and asked him to go back with her to her home for a cup of tea.

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"I didn't want it alone, so I was on my way to somebody's house—I forget whose."

"But, Gertrude, you're not going to waste that superb creation on me?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I always dress elaborately when I'm contemplating suicide; then by the time the last curl is in its place it seems a pity to do anything untidy. You're coming with me?"

"Of course I am. You were always good to me. God knows why!"

"I've liked you ever since you whipped a boy who had hurt my kitten."

"I remember the occasion. You bound up my wounds afterward with your pinafore."

"And I was spanked for tearing it into strips. Come into the library; it is pleasanter there."

He sank gratefully into one of the deep chairs.

"How did you know I wanted a refuge?"

"Because I wanted one myself."

He looked intently at her.

"Gertrude, you're thinner than you ought to be. What's the matter with you?"

"Broadhurst, I suppose."

"It's an awful disease."

"But don't let us seek narcotics," she said gently.

Edmund turned his eyes away as if he had read too much in her face. It was beginning to dawn upon him that the coming of his kinsfolk to Broadhurst had affected other lives beside his own. He could not

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understand why any woman should grieve over Magnus, but he was not of the temperament which makes the inexplicable a basis for adverse judgment.

"I'm afraid I'm always seeking them. A cocktail does more than a Bible text to make me charitable toward my fellow-men."

"Yes; and your cocktail will do everything to make your fellow-men uncharitable toward you—especially the people who never take them."

"You're a wonder, Gertrude. I wish you'd talk to me oftener."

She shook her head. "You know these things as well as I do."

He leaned forward and took one of her hands in his.

"I've known you, Gerty, since you could just toddle. We've always been such good friends—such chums! Let's marry, and get out of all this. Friendship's a better bond for marriage than this trouble they call love. What do you say, girl?"

She smiled, but shook her head.

"I should say it wouldn't be good sportsmanship in either of us. No, let's see the game out."

"Will you, if I will?" He spoke eagerly, as if for the moment he were a little schoolboy.

"Let's turn a gay face to Broadhurst," she answered.

They shook hands solemnly, and then laughed, but the laughter was wholesome, touched, indeed, with something of the fine indifference of those who, for the moment at least, look down from the heights.

CHAPTER X

ELEANOR and Constance entered quietly into the life of the rectory, and Constance, at least, felt at home there. The bare walls, the sparse furniture recalled her convent days, a memory strengthened by the close proximity of the church and the frequent services. She spent many hours in Magnus's study reading her favorite books, or listening to the sound of the choir boys' chanting coming faintly to her along the adjoining cloister. The priest thought her delicately responsive to these influences which played so important a part in his existence; but Constance had little self-consciousness in matters religious. The spirit of freedom in her, a birth inheritance, made her unreliable where formalism began. God's creation, rather than God Himself, delighted her, and to Eleanor, rejoicing in her daughter's youth, this was as it should be. She, herself, was no happier among Magnus's pale symbols than she had been in the secular atmosphere of William's home. Her own days were spent mainly in the studio which her nephew had fitted up for her. Here she worked upon the St. Michael, and James Sutro posed for her.

Magnus found his wooing a difficult enterprise, forc-

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ing him to change his conception of women as a newly discovered gospel might have changed the character of his theology. Unsatisfied natures are easily decoyed by emotion. Constance had sources of satisfaction which protected her from romance as effectually as a passion for Greek roots. One of these was a delight in nature which was almost a preoccupation, not without its element of "inhumanity." Magnus felt that if he should begin to tell her his love-tale on a dark afternoon, and the sun should come suddenly out, she would rise and leave him, as beckoned by a greater wonder, a fuller delight.

Her chief pleasure during the brilliant days of a late, exuberant spring, was the planting of the rectory garden, but according to no known rules of the art, Constance being chiefly concerned in weaving her fancies in flowers, haphazard as they came to her, with the result that the pansies found themselves visiting the tulips, and hyacinths were discovered among the vulgar vegetables. She was assisted by her Uncle Thomas, keenly appreciative of the youthful charm which she had brought into the rarified atmosphere of the rectory. He saw his little sister again in her, but freed from storm and striving. Constance was as placidly happy as if her mother had lived all the harshness of life out for her.

They were at work one afternoon in that portion of the garden where the flowers drifted toward the graves of the churchyard, when William Hatherley and Edmund passed by on their way from the factory.

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Edmund, since his conversation with Gertrude, had made a desperate effort to stick to his work, his motive being to regain in some measure the respect of his little cousin, whose aloofness, visible through her surface courtesy, continually hurt him.

"Stop and say a word," his father said, nodding in the direction of the two gardeners.

Edmund paused, but less at his father's wish than at the call of the picture Constance made as she bent over her flowers, with the absorbed face of a child saying something in private to a brown gnome of a pansy. At her Uncle William's whistle she laid down her trowel and sped toward them with a fleet, graceful movement.

"I am planting my mother's name in mignonette, as we used to do at the convent," she said gaily. "Uncle Thomas's will be all in scarlet sage."

"I wish you'd write our names in our garden," William said jealously.

"I will, if you'll let me. What flowers would you like?" she said to Edmund, forgetful for the instant of his fall from the height of her requirement.

"Bitter herbs would be best—or cabbages."

She regarded him thoughtfully.

"Now you look like your name—old and grave and wise," he said. "Before, you were just Daphne."

"There are two of me," she answered.

"I have divined as much. Show me your flowers."

As he went with her along the winding paths he recalled he knew not what finer memories of those col-

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lege readings in the classics which clustered about all that was young and immortally fair in the golden world of myths. He thought of Persephone among her pied and stained spring flowers; of nymphs lost even from the god's eyes in umbrageous twilights; of asphodels from the haunted kingdoms of desire.

"I shall have the garden of the Bragdon house to experiment with before very long. My mother has taken it for six months."

William was visibly delighted.

"You'll enjoy that place," he said heartily. "It's big and roomy and old-fashioned. And you can spread out and keep cool there when the summer sets in. It's near us, too, by a short cut through the orchards. Where is your mother this afternoon?"

"She is at vespers with Aunt Isabel."

An approving look passed over her uncle's face. He belonged to the generation which made churchgoing the very touchstone of respectability. And Eleanor had need of thaumaturgic aids to righteousness.

"I think I'll stop here and wait for them to come out." He seated himself on a flat tombstone elevated upon four columns. Glancing down as he did so he read the inscription. "Bless me! this is Grandfather Hatherley's grave—your great-grandfather, Constance."

"We're all here, cousin," Edmund said. "Not one of us had the enterprise to lay his bones on foreign soil."

"Yes; and here, I hope, we'll all be laid," William

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said sociably, laying his hand in an access of good humor upon his brother's shoulder. "Eh, Thomas?"

Thomas's pale smile was not affirmative.

"That cheerful destiny does not appeal to you, does it, Uncle Tom?" Edmund said in a sympathetic voice. "And why should we affect a sociability in death that we didn't feel in life. I know some of those old Hatherleys are growling down there in the mold at the close proximity of a wearisome mother-in-law."

Thomas joined in Constance's laugh. Edmund's plain speaking, like salt, sometimes corrected the septic tendencies of a family gathering.

Constance went from grave to grave as softly as the spring wind just then stirring the pale-green leaves only half-unfolded. She had an old-world reverence for these homes of the dead as abodes of peace still framed and hedged around by the warm visible world, and half-related to it through the tender chain of nature, linking the blessed trance of the sleepers to waving grass and dropping blossom. Edmund showed her the tomb of her mother's mother, with its sentimental and rambling epitaph written in the first exuberance of grief by William.

"We are all sure of being virtuous at last—on marble," Edmund said.

"I saw once an inscription on a child's grave in the yard of the old church at Hampstead that I liked. It was just, 'In love remember Elizabeth.'"

"Yes, that would do for life or death."

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At that moment Eleanor and Isabel appeared, followed by Magnus. Constance looked searchingly at her mother, reading in her face the old, recurrent mood of restlessness. Because she, herself, was beginning to be happy among her kinsfolk, she was eager that her mother should be content.

"What are you all doing in this dismal corner?" Isabel asked shrilly. "And you, William, who have just put off your flannels this morning," she added in a lower tone of wifely warning.

"We're having a family gathering," Edmund said flippantly, his mood again hard. "A real reunion this time." He waved a hand toward the graves.

"Edmund, that's awful!" his mother said. "Constance, my dear, the soles of your shoes look very thin."

But in spite of her protests they all lingered for a moment longer, Eleanor, as usual, the center of the group. She dominated them, yet she knew that they had the moral right to dominate her.

She proposed that they should walk with her as far as the Bragdon house, at which she had to stop for a moment. So, to outward appearance, a family party in very truth, they went two by two down the main street of Broadhurst. The house in question, one of the most attractive in the town, dated from the Colonial period, and its treasures of old furniture had made it famous in the countryside. Its Dutch garden was as well known as its old pewter. Eleanor's ability to rent it was a plume in the Hatherley cap.

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The thoughts of the elders were thus worldly, but to Magnus the house suggested functions, suitors, and other difficulties in the way of his winning Constance. He made up his mind to speak to her mother that very evening.

CHAPTER XI

MAGNUS, before his interview with Eleanor, went to the church for a half-hour of silent prayer compounded equally of heavenly meditations and the sweet desires of earth. He loved, yet he feared. A mediæval monk at heart, he had known from childhood the pain and struggle consequent upon the dogma of a dual universe. The flesh was always at war with the spirit. Its beauties, joys and seductions spun ærial rainbows over dark abysses. The great saints of the world when they passed before him, bore in their haggard and unlovely bodies the marks of their undying conflict. Beauty, indeed, could be disarmed only on the steps of the altar. He sought to translate even the charms of the first woman he had ever loved into terms of the eternal. They two would seek God hand in hand through far star-haunted roads.

He went pale from prayer and brooding vision into the study, where, presently, Eleanor joined him. She knew what Magnus intended to say and what she intended to answer, but she made no sign. She seated herself by the table. One hand toyed with an ivory paper-cutter carved in the shape of a cross.

“Are these symbols even on your linen, Magnus?”

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"I hope they are in my heart."

"You should be in the Catholic Church," she said musingly.

"I am glad to-night that I am not a Catholic," he answered, grateful for the opening her words afforded.

"Why not?"

"Because I could not marry."

"So you wish to marry!"

"I am not all priest, Mrs. Valgrave. I wish to marry your daughter."

She drew in her breath softly.

"Why?" she asked.

He flushed to the roots of his fair hair, but he looked at her steadily.

"There could be only one reason: I love her."

"That is easy to understand," she answered with a little sigh.

"It is my dearest hope that she will learn to love me."

"I would rather she would marry without love——"

He looked at her mystified.

"You surely do not believe in the Continental arrangement of marriages."

"I think they are as likely to produce happiness as the so-called love unions of which you boast so much over here, and which do not appear to diminish the number of your divorces."

Magnus cast about in his mind for answering arguments, but his logic was absorbed in emotion. Yet this retreat of hers to alien shores and to the standards

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of a society sealed from his experience was favorable to his enterprise.

"After all, if I waited for Constance to love me I might wait in vain."

The humility of the true lover was in his voice, and it pleased her.

"Constance is not likely to care deeply for anyone just now, except her mother. She will love late, for she is of slow development."

"I am glad of that," he said fervently. "I want to be the first to awaken her."

"It is the universal wish of man, the last sigh of the epicureans especially. You are not singular in that," she commented.

His fastidiousness shrank from his identification with world-weary men of pleasure. He went quickly back to the main point.

"You do consent, then?"

"As far as I am concerned, yes. I want her married early; and you and she have many tastes in common."

He felt puzzled and chilled by the argument of her acquiescence. Magnus, though not spoiled by the feminine adulation which is usually offered to a young and good-looking clergyman, was conscious in a reasonable degree of his desirability. He should have liked a more cordial recognition of his claims from Mrs. Valgrave, but between himself and her, much as he admired her, there seemed always a barrier, whether of chronology or temperament, he could not tell.

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"I thank you for your trust in me. I shall seek to win her love and her confidence. And if I have the happiness of gaining her, I shall keep her a child." He hesitated, and then added with tenderness, "She shall go slowly into her new life."

She gave him a grateful look. After all, she thought, he might understand even—no, with his temperament and training, it would not be possible!

"If you make her happy, there is nothing that I would not do for you," she said so earnestly, that her words were robbed of the vulgarity of bargaining. "It is my purpose, in any case, to release my brother from his work at the mills. Perhaps I could aid you in your own ambitions."

"I have none except for the church," he said hastily. "And if I have Constance, I want nothing else. Your coming back has transformed life here."

"It was an experiment that centered in my daughter. If she had not been happy I should have gone away again. There is only one other question I wish to ask you. Are you quite free?"

"What do you mean?" he asked nervously.

"I have heard—as the most reluctant ears have to hear gossip in a small town—that you were on the brink of an engagement with Miss Wayne."

He hesitated. Even at this critical moment he wished to tell the full truth.

"It is true that I was very much interested in her. I admire her, for there is a great deal in her to admire. What the feeling would have grown to if

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Constance had not come, I do not know. I only know that when she came, nothing else signified."

"And Miss Wayne?"

"I have not the slightest reason to believe that she had other than a friendly interest in me. She is devoted to church work."

"She seems too vital for that—I mean, to be wholly absorbed in it. Healthy young women of four-and-twenty are not, as a rule, intensely interested in guilds and Sunday School classes. If they are, it is a sign of limitation."

"I do not understand your attitude toward the church, Mrs. Valgrave."

"I could care more for it if I had not been surfeited with it in early childhood. I am not hostile to the church; I only regard it as a means to an end, and not an end in itself."

"But why should it not be an end?" he urged. "It is the Body of Christ made visible on earth."

"In Christ-like people, yes. I do not think it is an entity apart from them. I hope, however, that we are too enlightened to argue. But, one word more: Don't try to mold Constance into a churchwoman. Let her have her gypsy-religion, even if it take her into little unmarked lanes where you can't follow her."

Magnus looked grave. "I cannot promise you that, Mrs. Valgrave," he said truthfully, "for I desire with all my heart that Constance should share my love for the Church. A union would be for me no union that did not have one faith, one baptism. The destinies

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of the unborn are dependent on that perfect communion."

"You have a high ideal. Few of us think of the unborn. If we did there'd be but little mating."

Her eyes gazed past him to a scene of years ago. No thought of generations to come had marred its rapture.

"If you can win her," she went on, "these matters will probably adjust themselves."

She left him upon this and went into the drawing-room, where Thomas sat reading. He came forward to meet her with an expectant look.

"You know, probably, why Magnus wished to see me," she said.

"I know that he is in love with Constance. He has been, almost from the night he met her."

"I think he loves her as much as he could love any woman."

Thomas smiled. "You think his devotion to the church would always come first."

"Yes; but for my purposes, that does very well."

A shade of embarrassment passed over her brother's face. He was not accustomed to plain speaking.

"You mean?"

"That I don't lose her—she remains mine. You see?" She paused, then hurried on. "You must see the advantage of it. Magnus is closely allied to our family. There's no circle of questioning relatives. She doesn't have to be explained to a number of strangers. She will be hedged in, protected."

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"We'd be here to back her up in case—but there's no danger," he added anxiously.

"You mean rumor flying on black wings! I should not care if the whole world knew, so she didn't." She leaned over and placed her hand on her brother's knee. "Don't you see my miracle? I've sheltered her all these years from any knowledge. She worships the memory of her father, because I worshiped him. She thinks me all that is wonderful. I don't believe she'll ever love anyone as she loves me; and I'm glad—glad! I want to be first. My love can only comfort her."

She rose and began to pace the floor. Thomas watched her in silence, as long ago he had watched her tearing her way through the brambles of family difficulties, hurting herself more than she ever hurt others.

She paused at last opposite his chair. With a rush of home-seeking emotion her spirit came back from the desolate places in which it had been roaming. She sank upon a footstool by her brother's side, and then, as she had used to do in childhood, she moved closer to him and put her head upon his knee.

"How good you are not to attempt to comfort me."

"What do you mean, dear?" he asked.

"I mean if half the world were dumb, life would be easier for the other half."

He puzzled over this whimsicality. Eleanor's ability to detach herself suddenly from deep feeling sometimes made him doubt the reality of her emotions.

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The restless brain was always putting the clown's cap on the heart.

"My dear, saying nothing is the only talent of which I am possessed."

"I remember! You could be silent with me for hours together in that old rat-ridden library. Do you recall the veteran of the band? He had gray whiskers and the bright, cunning eyes of a very wicked old man, until we bribed him with cheese into a fatuous respectability. Then we named him Pecksniff."

"You were the most entertaining small sister that ever a boy was plagued with," he said tenderly.

He hoped that she would remain in those sunny recollections, but already she was returning.

"I was a torment to everyone. Constance couldn't understand that side of me, because she always makes me peaceful. When I'm with her I believe in myself."

She saw comprehension in his face. Her hand stole toward his.

"You'll help me to keep her mine," she whispered;
"I want her married—and I want her mine!"

CHAPTER XII

MAGNUS'S years of isolation in the religious life made his approach to Eleanor difficult, but they fitted him well for a romance, which as far as Constance's feelings were concerned was to be like Hamlet with Hamlet left out. Her mother's sanction to this foreign wooing at once aided and retarded his plans, alternately chilled and inspired him.

He offered characteristic gifts, white flowers and books of devotion, which Constance accepted with no apparent consciousness of their import. He realized after a time that her dependence upon the maternal will included emotional initiative. Even her little coquetties of dress and manner were a reflection of Eleanor's graces. He felt that it was best to approach her from the standpoint of a suitor acceptable to the first generation.

While he waited for the opportune moment he studied her with a lover's intensity of vision and delight over beauties of face and form. Constance had no trace of the Hatherley features. The curve of her lips, her small chin square rather than round, the deep setting of her brown eyes beneath beautiful brows recalled the miniature of her father—that parent whose relationship to the Hatherley family had never seemed

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real—little more than an adumbration on Eleanor's life.

The propitious hour arrived at last. Magnus coming out of the church one brilliant afternoon in May, and seeing Constance alone in her garden, felt that his opportunity had come. He crossed the lawn, his black clothes the one spot of darkness in the glowing exuberant scene. Constance came to meet him. A garden-hat shadowed her face which glowed with health and the pleasure of her floriculture. He took her hand and led her silently past the place of graves to a spot where bushes of white lilac shut out the street and shut them in with the garden.

"I have something to tell you, dear," he said in a gentle voice that was not quite firm.

She looked at him expectantly. Then drew down against her face a branch of white lilac, inhaling the perfume with a deep breath of delight. It was evident that she heard no rush of announcing wings.

"What would you think would be the most natural thing that could happen to me living day by day so near you Constance?"

She reflected a moment.

"I suppose you would either like me or dislike me," she said frankly.

"It is more than liking, dear."

She released the lilac branch, turning suddenly as white as the flowers themselves, but she remained silent, not looking at him after her first startled wondering glance.

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"I want to marry you, Constance."

She did not move nor speak. Her clear brown eyes gazed across the garden with a light in them of curious impersonal amazement. He did not break the silence which became for him, as hope grew, a kind of happy trance. Through it he was aware of the heavy odor of the lilac, of the dappled light on the grass, of a robin running near with quick meditative pauses. At last Constance turned toward him, a new dignity in her manner, a touch of reserve not visible before.

"Have you spoken to my mother, Magnus?"

"Yes, dear."

"What did she say?"

"She gives her consent."

Constance was silent."

"Dearest, I have not hurt you?"

She did not speak at once.

"Did—did she say she wished me to marry?"

"Not that of course. If I can gain your love——!"

"She said, then, if you could gain my love she would be willing."

"Yes, dearest."

He was troubled, and half resentful of that third person whose presence was almost as palpable as if Eleanor, herself, sat beside them. He saw that Constance was with her mother, not with him, questioning her, it might be reproaching her, and not wholly happy.

"Dear?"

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His entreating voice pierced her pre-occupation.

"How can I know if I could love you, Magnus?" she said at last. "You see, I have not been thinking about these matters. My life has been so full."

Her manner, as well as her words, were appealing, as if she would be glad to please him, but was not sure of herself. Her wistful graciousness touched a deeper chord in his nature than the clamor of passion. He took both her hands and pressed them to his lips.

"I've thought of nothing else since your coming. I never really lived before. I never really loved before," he said eagerly, conveying the world-old platitude with the ever-new emotion. He was nearer the truth in uttering it than most men, for he had been a celibate of the spirit. "When you came all was changed. Even religion could not satisfy me. You hushed my prayers. Give me back my heaven, dear, through your love."

She looked troubled.

"You put too much in my hands, Magnus. You make me feel as if I had some duty that I couldn't fulfill. I am not used to that. I've always been able to keep abreast of my life."

It was easy to believe that this was her first glance into uncertainty. He looked tenderly at her.

"Ah, sweetheart, when you wake up, this will not seem strange or new. You are asleep, as these flowers were in March."

"Perhaps," she answered. "But I have everything

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I want, Magnus. I know I shall have to marry some day, but——”

“What, dear?”

She shook her head, unable to express herself. He regarded her with jealous eyes. For years he had cherished an ideal of womanhood, and his captious, fastidious spirit rejoiced over Constance as the incarnation of his dream. He could imagine no one fitter to be his bride, and, above all, to be the mother of his children. His religious temper of mind conceived of the duty to the unborn as supreme, involving, if necessary, the sacrifice of personal desire. He longed, despite Eleanor's warning, to bring Constance within the ark of all righteousness—the church; for it was not in him to recognize goodness flowing from unofficial sources. Vagrant sainthood he could not away with!

“Give me hope, at least, that I stand first among the suitors,” he pleaded.

She looked at him in amused wonder.

“But there are no others, Magnus.”

“There will be!”

She rose at that.

“It rests entirely with my mother. What she wishes in the matter I will do.”

He saw that he had gone around practically in a circle. What remained to him was to take Eleanor at her word—the word that was law to her daughter.

CHAPTER XIII

NOW we are in Paris again!"

Constance stood in the center of a room in the Bragdon house, which, being in an unused wing, formed part of a hitherto empty suite now transformed by Eleanor's furniture and pictures. She had sent for them unknown to her daughter as soon as she was sure that the engagement to Magnus was a settled fact.

It had become so in an uneventful and, for Constance, untroubled fashion. It would have seemed to the young girl not quite well-bred to be in love. Her affection for Magnus, his wish to marry her, her mother's consent, were three sufficient reasons for her own acquiescence. The change would be simply one of degree, for they were all to be together as before.

Eleanor's importation of the symbols of their old life she had held secret from Constance until everything was in its place, reproducing, as far as possible, the effect of their old rooms. To the mother it was the farewell evocation of a vanished joy which had to do wholly with her maternal life. Her years with Godfrey were the source of restless memories, but her nurture of her daughter had all the sweetness in retrospect of a heavenly communion—they two cloistered

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together in innocence. She had robed herself in the child's soul as in a wedding garment.

"Do you remember, mother, when we bought this?" Constance said, her hand on an inkstand of quaint pattern.

"I do, indeed. I remember we spelled out the Latin motto—'God knows the writer's thoughts'—and wondered whether it were a blessing or a curse."

Constance passed from one thing to another, touching each with loving reminiscent fingers. In this worn copper bowl they had put the first violets. The face of this saint, stiff and sweet against its tarnished gold background, had been the first to shine from dimness in the pearly light of dawn. This prayerbook she had used at Denise's wedding in the Madeleine. She stood long before the chief treasure, a Watteau, which had been her father's wedding gift to her mother, a landscape suffused with an unreal, saffron light, surrounding unreal lovers "soon to love no more."

"Magnus must see this!"

"Do you think he would care for it?"

"Perhaps not. He loves best Botticellis and Peruginos, I've discovered. He is a mystic, mother, but I like that, because it keeps him at a distance."

"A strange reason! Won't your happiness depend somewhat on his near companionship?"

"I can't quite explain. It is that I like persons whose thoughts are not always in the same room with you. You, yourself, trained me to that. How far away you used to go sometimes."

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"Did I? Well, then I can say nothing. But don't you think marriage ought to make you happier than you were before?"

Constance crossed the room and knelt by her mother, putting her arms about her.

"Not happier than before; I have all that I want now."

Eleanor clasped her close. Since her conversation with Magnus she had spent many hours in fruitless self-torment and self-accusation. She knew—pitilessly knew—that her agreement to this marriage was built, as she had told her brother, upon her desire to keep Constance for her own. This family soon to be formed would be dependent upon her—almost for their very bread. They would be linked to her by a hundred obligations. Her munificent patronage of Thomas and Magnus was the price she would pay for holding her daughter still against her breast. She had early seen that Magnus's only possible infidelity as a husband would be his passion for the church. His pre-occupation with matters ecclesiastic would leave his wife free for the old sweet ties; perhaps for the new ones of her own maternity. Yet, as a woman who had known the ultimate possibilities of love, she asked herself what right she had to defraud Constance of that happiness.

She quieted her conscience with a counter-contingency. Suppose the trickery of circumstance should arouse in her daughter something, which by all the laws of inheritance, should be in her blood. No, bet-

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ter to marry her young and unawakened—to give her, sleeping, to her husband.

“Dearest, I’ll try to make up to you. Oh, no! That isn’t possible! Constance, you shouldn’t marry without love, and I am letting you!”

The girl rose and looked down upon her mother with winsome graciousness.

“I do love Magnus, but I should always care more for you than for anyone. If you waited for me to care less you would have me on your hands a spinster. Mütterchen, look up and smile at me—now smile!”

At that moment a visitor was announced.

“Tell them we are in Europe,” Constance said whimsically. “We cannot get home for eight days.”

“No, no; it is Mr. Bradmore, I must see him. I have twice——”

“Why does he come so often? You do not care for him, do you, dear? You must tell me before I shall allow you to go down.”

“I care not at all. Don’t be foolish.”

“I believe you, mother. It is well.”

To a bachelor, who has gone straight to nature in his crises of imagination concerning a petticoated world, the thought of investigation by the road of finality called marriage, is a disconcerting novelty. Bradmore, in his rare invasions of the mating universe, had sought the primitive or indifferent woman to whom an hour of love-making was of passing significance. He had always considered romance as a state too deli-

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cate and evanescent to bear the chain of the law. Marry women for posterity or household utility, but never for love—as well imprison the fleeting perfume of a rose.

Eleanor Valgrave had changed not his theories, but his practice—a far different matter! Drawn to her first by her love of nature, as intense as his own, he had soon passed beyond reasons for seeking her companionship. She called him as his garden called him, or a warm gleam of sunlight after hours of gloom. He knew at last that he wished to marry her: that he desired it more than he had ever desired anything in his life. He felt that his teeming fields, his gay spring orchards, his gardens would become waste places to him should she not consent. This morning call was turned quickly, therefore, into an hour of confession. Without preliminaries he told her the miracle she was to him, growing pink and young and boyish in the recital. Eleanor wondered whether it was her present tamed self he cared for, or all the people she had been across the water. A woman inhabited by the ghost of a great feeling knows that the cry of the specter is often answered by living human voices.

“You are unwise to be discontented with your solitude,” she said when he paused. “You must go back before you discover that I am nothing but an anxious and doting mother, an elemental creature.”

“You!”

“Yes, I!”

“You are saying no to me, then.”

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"I say no to everything that does not concern Constance."

He had not needed her words to tell him that he had awakened no emotional response in her. An aching sense of loneliness filled him as novel as it was poignant. He felt that he had been too precipitate, had sought too impatiently for certainty, now a certainty of unhappiness. He wished himself back in the realm of silence where all things are possible because no word has been spoken.

"But you have a life apart from hers whether you will or no," he said.

"I do not recognize it," she replied.

"I cannot understand such absorption—lovely as your daughter is."

"Even husbands do not understand it. What is born of pleasure can never be wholly appreciated."

"But if you should love again," he urged.

"I should not marry."

His personal desire was for the moment merged in his curiosity. He had never resented Remling's letter because he had not believed it—the tittle-tattle of the artists' circle in Paris seemed but a gossamer bridge upon which to walk to a conclusion. And if there had been divagations—what of them! The roads to the perfecting of human nature were nearly always winding. But he wondered now whether some oblique experience was at the bottom of this unreasonable and perhaps morbid devotion to a child.

"Why? if I may ask."

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"I had a perfectly happy marriage; I am past forty. There are certain emotions and experiences that I have put away finally. I am reading other books."

"You have put them away because no fresh ones have arrived strong enough to have power over you. But I had hoped——"

"Count on nothing but my friendship. That I can give you wholly. Don't let us lose it," she went on. "I value so much your kindness and sincerity. If you withdraw now I shall lose the only friend I have in Broadhurst."

"I shall not withdraw. I could not if I would. But you have many friends," he added.

"Not here."

He was silent, for he had himself encountered the prejudices of Broadhurst against Mrs. Valgrave.

"Would you like to see my St. Michael before it goes to the church?" she asked to turn his thoughts into another channel.

"No, I don't want to see it," he answered brusquely.

"I want only one thing in the world."

"You have it."

"That is untrue," he said with curt emphasis.

"Since I haven't you."

"And you think I could make you happy," she said as if to herself.

"I know it."

She mused a moment, her mind traversing the fields of disillusion, which neighbor the shimmering margins of the ideal world.

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"Forgive me, but do you think you are fitted for married life. Not all of us are."

"How can I know except through experience! I've weighed its banalities against your charm, or I should not be here. But you are right. It must take many gifts—a rare intellect to begin with."

"I should say a rare heart. I have seen countesses bungle, and I've seen peasant women bring the state to its perfection—with no more subtle offerings than a good soup and an honest kiss for a tired man!"

"But a queen could do no more!—a queen could do no more," he repeated.

The burden of his longing was in the words, and they closed for the present his plea. He went on to speak of indifferent matters. Later when he took his leave she watched him as he walked through the garden, wondering what need of his she met. Though a proud woman she had little of that vanity which is fed by the deprivations of others. In her own crucial experience she had been the conquered, not the conqueror, and this fact had ever afterward made her merciful.

"I wonder if I could have lived up to my own ideal of marriage," she thought, "or whether I'd have grown comfortable and indifferent, or waspish and jealous and lean—probably the latter. Godfrey was a marvelous lover, but as a husband—Oh, no, he couldn't have been a good husband. He wasn't limited enough, or else he was too limited, a rover and an amateur in all the arts—Oh, no! I had the best of

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him. How he would have chafed under bonds! Yet I believe that I could have made them beautiful, divine."

His face rose before her, the brown eyes full of feeling, capable of expressing every shade of it, the low, wide, beautiful brow—these features had always been hers, she said, because his true spirit dwelt behind them—what was lasting in his fascination, his tenderness, his perfect range of sympathies. His distinguished figure bore out the testimony of the eyes, but his hands were selfish—fine, soft, white, the nails overkept. Yet the African expedition might have made permanent his sporadic nobility. Death hid him. She could not know.

She was roused from her reverie by the announcement of young Sutro and his mother. Eleanor came forward with a cordial greeting. The genuineness of these people made her feel nearer to them than to the members of her own circle.

"I shall take you straight to the picture. I wish it were for you," she said to Mrs. Sutro.

She led them to a bare north room, empty of everything but a few chairs and the easel which supported the painting. The archangel was poised in the first solemn break of dawn above a retreating cloud of darkness, into which his sword was plunged for the last time. The face had little triumph in it, and something of the weariness of defeat.

Eleanor drew up a chair for Mrs. Sutro, who sat for some moments in silence. Her worn features gradu-

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ally relaxed into a warm maternal glow; then her eyes grew bright with tears.

"Do you like it?" Eleanor asked gently.

"It's not an angel. It's my own son."

Sutro turned to Eleanor with a look that asked her to understand.

"She wanted it so much to be a likeness. She'll go twice to church now on Sundays!"

"I know how she feels. I did my best to make it a good portrait of you."

"I can't thank you enough, Mrs. Valgrave."

The mother in the woman had added a cubit to her stature as she rose to view the picture from another angle. Eleanor saw that she would like to be alone with her treasure.

"I want to show you my garden, Mr. Sutro. We shall leave your mother to rest awhile."

The community of comprehension destroyed for a moment the barrier between them created by difference of years and of social placing. They walked together silently until they reached the flower-bed, where she paused to cut some of the choicest roses.

"And do you like the painting? You have never said."

"I like it," he answered.

The absence of superlatives pleased her.

"I want to say now," he went on, "that if you ever wished to come up in the hills for your health or pleasure, our house is yours. Everything we have is yours."

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"I shall come some day. It is an ideal place."

"I find it dull sometimes," he said.

"You are restless?"

"I haven't time to be in summer, but in winter the farm's like a chain to me. I wanted to leave it when I was a boy, but one by one my brothers died, then my father died. Things closed in around me. I couldn't get away. Now it is impossible. My mother wants to end her days there."

He had never spoken at such length to her. This, then, was the reason of the look she had seen so often in his face, a kind of baffled patience.

"What would you like to do if you could leave the farm?"

"I should like to be a social worker. I should like to help the poor."

The answer disappointed her.

"I hope you are not a socialist."

"Do you disbelieve in them, Mrs. Valgrave?"

She smiled. "They have excellent theories, but I think they talk too much. I have seen a group of them about a little café table, talk for hours on the dignity of labor. Then I dislike their leveling tendencies. But I really know little of the sounder side of socialism."

"I think you know a great deal about everything," he said earnestly. "I wish you would tell me how to be content on the farm."

"I'm not the fittest person to teach contentment. Why not make it your toy, a beautiful toy to play

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with every day, with the unseen God for your playmate? ”

“ God as a playmate!—well, why not? ” he went on, as if to himself. “ I’m tired of having Him such a distance off. These are not orthodox sayings, ma’am,” he ended quaintly.

“ You need not be orthodox so long as you love your mother. Come, we must take her the roses.”

CHAPTER XIV

EDMUND declined to attend the family dinner given in honor of the betrothed by Eleanor. His mother for once upheld him in his ungraciousness. She had always been jealous of Magnus, whose virtues seemed a tacit imputation on the character of her own son.

On the evening of the festivity William Hatherley found his wife dressing reluctantly in a gown of minor importance. She asked him to adjust some hooks, and while he was clumsily performing this office, she turned a discontented face to him.

"I can't understand what Eleanor means—marrying Constance to a country parson! With that fortune she could have married her anywhere, and no questions asked."

"I am not so sure about the questions. I am tempted to think that that is the chief reason she is marrying her in the family."

"I don't believe the child's in love with Magnus," Isabel said in a softer voice. Her affection for her little niece was real enough to survive even this latest grievance. Isabel had had her own longings for a daughter in the far-off past.

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"Eleanor's experience wasn't favorable to making love the main issue, though she has come out of it well enough," William commented.

"I don't believe the Lord punishes people for their sins," Isabel said querulously. "What advantage has a good woman except to lose her looks and her temper?"

William made a grumbling sound in his throat. Such running comments while he was hooking a gown made the process doubly irritating.

"Magnus, of course, knows nothing," she went on.

"No, and he never will. Thomas would never tell him now."

"If he did, do you think it would make any difference?"

William shrugged his shoulders. "How could I tell? He'd probably pray for Eleanor and marry Constance."

"Constance doesn't need praying for. One would think her parents had been saints. I have always kept the Commandments—and look at Edmund!"

Her husband declining to gaze on his absent offspring as an example of the capriciousness of the heavenly powers, Isabel proposed departure, and they went off together, fretfully. William had his own sources of discontent with this prospective union, its sole advantage to him personally being that he would no longer have to employ his brother as bookkeeper. The burden was shifted to Eleanor's shoulders. On the

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other hand, this newly-recovered sister would leave Broadhurst with all the miserable blunders of their years of separation still unadjusted. His old domineering love of her cried out at times for complete confidence on her part. But Eleanor through all these months had shown no sign of entering the confessional. She seemed as perfectly poised on that dark incident of her past as on the shining hill of a good deed. Like Isabel, he had his own moments of doubting the moral justice of the universe.

They found the drawing rooms of the Bragdon house as elaborately decorated for this small gathering as if all Broadhurst were expected. Against the background of lights and flowers Eleanor and Constance appeared more than usually reminiscent of the world from which the advantages they possessed were chiefly derived. The mother, indeed, was not unconscious that this stage setting about her daughter was the climax of a long series of pictures, whose keynote was unreality.

On the edge of the soft moon of luxury Thomas and Magnus hovered happily. They had never dreamed of so fortunate a rescue by such altogether beautiful people. The son, at least, felt the intervening hand of God. His years of patient priesthood, like a narrow star-lit road, had suddenly opened into a spacious land. And Constance, herself, did not make him feel less the priest as he grew more the lover. The exquisite quality of her maidenhood linked congruously all his aspirations.

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Isabel felicitated Magnus with scant words, but she kissed her niece and wished her happiness with that rather dejected note, not seldom found in the voices of congratulating matrons. William addressed himself to Eleanor.

"I hope it's for the best. You and I have reached the time of life when we don't want to suffer through our children."

"Constance could never cause me suffering. It would be only her pain that I should feel."

"I don't know how you're to keep her from it in this world. But then you've accomplished so many impossible things—you may do even that."

"You think I am a miracle worker? I had to be." She faced him, and he saw in her eyes the intensity of a past and future purpose. He was beginning to understand how her love for her child had inspired her with an almost insolent courage. He wanted to say more to her, but the amenities of the occasion forbade too serious topics. The social obligation was always a part of Eleanor's armor. But he would seek an opportunity after dinner to lead her gradually into a discussion, personal in its import.

The dinner, however, proved a veritable gateway to that nonchalance toward the weightier matters of existence which, through some obscure irony, is more often induced by material than by moral means. Eleanor knew that six courses and three wines were the price of a united family, and she paid it handsomely. By the time coffee was served in the embowered drawing-

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room, William had arrived at that point of charity which even questioned accepted ethics. Were they not after all a matter of climate? Looking across at Isabel he was inclined to think they were a matter of climate. This train of thought brought him at last behind a bizarre gilt screen in the far, delightful East. He heard the jingle of bracelets on little ankles and rounded wrists. Isabel, herself, had forgiven Eleanor everything, and was only waiting for the psychological moment in which to ask her the recipe of the wonderful pudding served for the sweet course. Thomas, in a secular cloud of blue smoke from an impeccable cigar, saw his ultimate release from incense through Eleanor's refined paganism. Magnus was quietly happy.

When the guests were gone, mother and daughter went into the garden which lay broad and white under a high moon. Every leaf and flower was touched with silver. The very shadows were argent. Constance and Eleanor wandered in and out of them, glad as always, to be alone again. They sat down to rest at last in a rustic bench.

"Are you happy, mummie?"

"Why do you ask me that so often?"

"I want to be sure."

"If I were not happy I should not tell you."

"I should know. I am a magician!"

"You are evidently making Magnus very happy."

Constance pondered. "You can always make people happy if you don't care too much for them."

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"A deep saying. What do you mean?"

"If I loved intensely I should find it difficult not to let my worst qualities show. I am afraid I should be jealous and exacting. I should want the beloved all to myself. But when I have just a strong affection, as I have for Magnus, it is easy to be unselfish."

"Oh, I know. Indifference is the mother of many virtues. I never cared for anybody or anything in my life that I didn't get into trouble. Keep your indifference, dearest, only make it gentle. Is that Edmund crossing the lawn?"

Constance went to meet him.

"Dear my cousin," she said with sweet reproach, "you were unkind not to come to my dinner."

"I've come to make my peace with you and your lady-mother."

"What excuses do you bring?"

He hesitated, but as he looked at her, he thought it best to tell the truth.

"My little cousin, I hate family dinners. We know too much about each other. I, being the black sheep, feel even less at ease than the others. Do you comprehend?"

"Your logic would apply to any gathering," she answered.

"Why were you ungracious to-night?" Eleanor asked, coming to meet him.

"I've been explaining to Constance that, as an unregenerate, I avoid the assembling of my relatives—even when you are the hostess."

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Eleanor saw his mood, and sent Constance away on an errand to the house. Then she said directly:

"I'm glad you've come. I was afraid this engagement would be the beginning of your withdrawal." A note of apology was in her voice.

He sat down awkwardly by her, his eyes fixed on the ground.

"I oughtn't to come unless I could be decent," he said. "I had planned something gracious to say to Constance, but the moment I saw her I blundered into the brusque and raw. But you ought to pardon me," he added. "Your coming was disastrous. I wanted to climb out of the old, and I had no chance for the new. I disgraced myself at the start."

He broke off abruptly. Eleanor remained silent. He looked up at last and met her eyes.

"You mustn't think that I dreamed of Constance. She's my cousin, and even if she weren't, she's too far above me. I know that Magnus is the fitter, but that's just it. If he had gone to the devil just once in his life, he'd know better what other men go through."

"I understand. You don't know how fitted I am to understand. I don't attempt to explain this engagement, but perhaps if you knew all you would feel differently."

The pain in her voice called him out of his self-absorption.

"I'm a stupid brute. Forgive me. Don't cease to be friends with me. You're the only real friend I

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have beside Gertrude Wayne, and she has gone off to Europe."

"I need your friendship more than you need mine."

He looked incredulous. "I!—in rags and tatters!"

"The better for me," she answered.

CHAPTER XV

AS the weeks of the summer went by Magnus found to his satisfaction that Constance was becoming more and more the central figure in the horizon of his future, dominating even the proud spires of a metropolitan church. Despite his ecclesiastical ambitions, he shrank from the element of worldliness which they necessarily contained. In theory, at least, he desired the grace of poverty, the nimbused, unreal poverty of the ideal priest as different from actual poverty as a painted battle from a field of war.

Constance was making it easier for him to believe in the finer elements of their coming union. Her nature gravitated to the beautiful aspects of any situation, the fortunate moments of any hour. The very lack of intensity in her feeling toward him—as she herself divined—made it possible for her to dwell on those little graceful elements of intercourse which often perish in a flame of passion. Their association was like a fine and splendid friendship on the borderland of romance, so near, indeed, as to know on occasion the play of its magic light.

He had put off from week to week speaking to her

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of the subjects dearest to his heart, for he feared lest he should broach them when she was not in a responsive mood. He knew that he could count always on her courteous interest, but he had already found that her spirit was not always accessible. He did not prize her the less for her withdrawals.

"What do you think is the strongest bond between two persons?" he asked her one autumn morning, when she had been singing some French songs to him with a zest and grace which reminded him of her foreign origin and perhaps foreign ideals. He hoped that this question might lead her where his own thoughts dwelt most.

"I suppose it is love," she answered.

"How little you have known of it, dear!"

"I have known much," she claimed.

"You've been secretive, then."

She looked up archly. "I was thinking of my mother."

A jealous thrill went through him. He was beginning to long for a detached Constance, isolated, dependent upon him alone for authority to be happy.

"Some day, perhaps, you'll think of me."

"I do think of you, Magnus; but I can't always put my thoughts into words."

"I can wait, dear."

He enjoyed in silence for a moment the graciousness of the picture she made in the frame of the window. The sunlight gilded her hair and intensified the whiteness of her complexion. He loved most of all her

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look of dreaming innocence, which was joined, he had discovered, with a keen and fearless mode of thought, often embarrassing to his conventional habits of mind.

"Has your mother spoken to you of my plans for leaving St. Michael's?"

"She told me yesterday. I am glad that you are going to have the kind of church that you want. Tell me about St. Helen's."

He complied eagerly with the enthusiast's love of detail. He numbered its stones and its pillars. He pictured the saints and prophets in its windows. He made her hear the peal of its great organ through Gothic archways and see the long procession of the choristers led by the jeweled cross. He even described the wonderful stores of embroidered vestments for which the church was famous. She listened attentively, but he could not judge from her expression whether or not she was impressed. When he had finished, she said:

"I want to tell you of a little church I saw once in Italy. It was a tiny, whitewashed affair of rough stones perched on a high hill in the Apennines. From its door you could see very far. Inside there was a stone altar underneath a fresco so faded that the faces of the saints were scarcely visible. A few peasants formed the congregation. The priest seemed as poor as they. It was still and solemn and near the sky—I loved it."

An uneasy look passed over Magnus's face. He

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wondered if she could be consciously drawing a contrast.

"But, dearest, these external things are, after all, secondary. The main point is for two people who love each other to be one in their religious life and aspirations, and—forgive me—you do not seem to me a good churchwoman."

"Why, Magnus?"

"You seem—at times—indifferent to what are vital matters."

She gave him a shy, appealing look. "If the sun shines, what does it matter whether you have seven candles or two on the altar?"

He sighed. "I wish I could bring you to understand that it is not wholly a question of ritual. I believe in the church as the bride of Christ, her sacraments as the springs of grace. My dream is to restore her ancient catholicity, to set her, so to speak, on seven hills, and crown her with a dome."

"It seems a hopeless ambition to me, Magnus. But I have seen so much of the Church of Rome; I was very close to it for many months. I don't think it can be rivaled on its own line. You'd have to do something quite different to match its power."

He looked at her in surprise, for she rarely spoke with authority, her manner, as a rule, being deferential—a delicate deference that seemed to him the very flower of good breeding.

"But we have as much right to the ancient inheritances as they."

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She pondered this.

"Wouldn't it be better to create a future glory than to revive the past?"

"Our salvation is in the past, dear."

He made the sign of the cross. She bowed her head for a moment, for she had been well-trained in the courtesies of religious observance.

"I like you for believing intensely what you do believe, Magnus. I will help you all that I can when we—when we are married."

Her good-will shone in her eyes. He took her hands and, bending over them, kissed them reverently.

"You are sweet! But tell me, what do you believe? Say your little credo for me. Now, clasp your hands, and say it."

His face, pale and priestly, but with lover's pride in it, was close to hers.

"Say it, dear," he repeated.

"I don't think I could put it into words," she faltered. "I believe in God and in Christ, but I cannot tell much about them. I believe in being happy, and in telling the truth."

"I prefer your creed to that of Athanasius, at least. Why do you speak of truth-telling especially?"

"Because it seems to me most important. I could never love or trust a person who had once told me a lie."

"I think you are right, dearest. Ah, we'll work it out together. We'll find a common road." He felt

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that they were nearer than ever before. After all, she believed in duty as strongly as he did. It must inevitably lead her to God's altar.

"Before I go I should like to say good morning to your mother."

Constance hesitated. "She is in her very own rooms, but I think I can take you there now. I mean the rooms she filled with our Paris furniture. You've never seen them."

They found Eleanor seated at a desk which, like certain types of French furniture, had its own air of coquetry.

"I ventured to bring Magnus here, mother. He wanted to greet you before leaving."

Eleanor leaned back in her chair and held out a careless hand.

"You find me among the relics of the past—but it's pretty driftwood, isn't it?"

She pushed her dark hair from her forehead and clasped her hands behind her head as she looked at the priest through half-closed eyes. With her uplifted chin, her parted lips, her indefinable art of audacity she had the appearance of a Boldini portrait. A strange doubt stirred Magnus. He had seen her thus twice before, when the mystery of the years abroad took palpable and, incredible though it seemed, sinister form. It was only a trick of his imagination, he knew, but it made him none the less uncomfortable.

He looked about at the furniture—an intricate

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chronicle, indeed, of sensitive, deeply-tinctured temperaments in an environment where life might be tragic or comic, but never commonplace.

"You admire that little shrine? It should have violets fading before it, but I cannot pretend an instinct even for the sake of an effect."

"May I open it?" he asked.

"Certainly; but you know the old saying, 'the opening of the shrine will always find it empty. The god is gone.'"

"I am looking for nothing so pagan," he answered, a slight shadow on his face. "But what a genius you have for collecting beautiful things."

He went from one object to another with undisguised curiosity and interest. He stood long before the Watteau, but a copy in oil of a Perugino elicited his enthusiastic admiration.

"I did not collect these things. They were chiefly gifts from—from Constance's father. He had rare taste. His was the religion of beauty—the truest of all religions."

She spoke with a kind of defiance. Constance looked anxiously at Magnus, but he made no comment. He was inwardly wishing that Eleanor would not promulgate such doctrine before her daughter. He ended his inspection shortly afterward and took his leave.

When he was gone, Eleanor drew Constance down beside her with a pleading gesture.

"Sweetheart, don't look so grave. Your mummie

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is not always her best self in this room. You shouldn't have brought Magnus here."

"But what is there here to disturb him. What could a few beautiful things do to him!"

"Magnus couldn't understand the kind of living they symbolize. Do you know why you never rest well in certain rooms? They are too full of specters."

"Mother, you are not happy!"

"Extraordinary insight."

Constance drew herself from the encircling arms.

"Don't speak in that tone. It hurts me, as if you stood far off and mocked me."

"Mocked you! baby mine how could I!"

She was all tenderness again.

"Now you are back."

"We'll talk of the future, not the past. Has Magnus told you that he may go to St. Helen's in January. He wishes to marry you in December."

"In December!"

"Does it surprise you, dear heart?"

"I did not think it would be so soon," Constance answered wistfully.

"Is it too soon? You see it is best for us all to be together, and Magnus is leaving."

"Mother, do you believe that I will make a good wife?"

Eleanor did not answer for a moment. She had kept at bay self-reproach for her arbitrary arrangement of her daughter's life, but on this occasion it gripped her beyond her power to ignore it. How could

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she be sure that her immense precautions would bulwark her three-fold aim: to keep Constance with her, to insure her happiness, to insure her life-long ignorance of a great crucial fact.

"What makes you ask me that, sweetheart?"

"I don't know. I often wonder. Magnus cares so much that if I failed him——"

"You couldn't fail anyone! I've proved you! Does it worry you, this marriage? We'll give it up for the present if it does——"

"No. We've given our word and I want you to go to the city. It will be better. You don't seem quite happy here, mother."

"That is true. I have made few friends—even among my own people."

"What a strange thing to say. Could anyone be more popular than you are!"

"I'm not really popular. I was simply the fashion this summer."

Her daughter gazed anxiously at her.

"Don't get the lonely look. You know how I used to dread it, even when I was a very little girl."

She shivered in the warm air of the room. Her mother drew her closer, and closer, with soft nursery kisses.

"You shouldn't watch me so. You are, I believe, after all, something of a tyrant."

Magnus, meanwhile, was walking slowly home to the rectory, pondering the events of the morning and, as usual, clothing them with the vesture of his own

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attitude toward life. Two facts stood out distinctly: that Constance, for all her child-looks, and her young, appealing ways, was already molded by a firm, courageous hand; that her mother was not as identified with her as outward appearances showed, but had a secret life of her own. He had entered into his engagement with Constance, confident of his power to shape the destiny of the family of which he would be the head. But his confidence had been already shaken. The mother, the ruling force, seemed courteously indifferent to his dearest aims—with that indifference of all its forms most paralyzing which acquiesces in the outward expression of an ambition, and even furthers it, but cares nothing for its spirit. Eleanor had once said to him after one of his elaborate services, "*C'est magnifique mais ce n'est pas la guerre.*" The observation rankled.

On reaching his study, he found a visitor in the quiet place, a rare visitor and the least desirable in the whole parish, his cousin Edmund, lolling in an arm-chair and smoking a cigarette. He did not rise as Magnus entered.

"Pardon me for making myself at home. I thought as you were with my cousin that I might have to wait a long time."

He tossed the cigarette into the fireplace, then straightened himself and looked Magnus steadily in the eyes.

"You know why I am here?"

"I have not the slightest idea."

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"I will aid your memory. You may perhaps recall that a cousin of yours on your mother's side is a member of the firm of Langwell and Company, in Boston."

The words came out sharply. Magnus flushed, but he did not speak.

"I applied a month ago for a position in their South American office. I did not know then of the chain of relationship. I learned later—never mind how—it was not by examining your letter-file, so you needn't glance at it—that this cousin of yours wrote to you asking if certain facts about me were true. You evidently replied that they were, and with a vengeance. You lost me the job. I hope you are satisfied."

Magnus's eyes grew frosty. A shadow of contempt was in his face.

"You know that I would never have gone out of my way to put on record anything about you, but I was asked direct questions concerning your habits—and the truth to me is a sacred thing."

"I suppose you'd cheerfully damn anybody if the truth were at stake. Couldn't you—I ask as a matter of psychological investigation of the clerical temperament—have said without offense to your conscience that such and such things were so—three months—six months—a year ago—but that you could not vouch that I had not since then had a vision on the road to Damascus? I suppose not! I am a moral fixture to you—or immoral; an absolute quantity; an arrested sinner. By the devil! I'll cheat you yet of your saintly satisfaction. I don't know anything that would cause

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you keener disappointment than to have me numbered with the respectable members of the community—no wine, no women, and the right to kick those who are down. Thank you—I'd rather go to hell—good morning!”

He flung out of the study and out of the house, slamming the door after him.

Magnus sat motionless, his hands tightly clenched, his face hard and set. He rose after a time, and lit a fire of newspapers on the hearth, then from his file took a letter which he tore into fragments without re-reading the thanks of a metropolitan firm for a clear and unprejudiced statement of facts.

CHAPTER XVI

ISABEL was seated in her bedroom sewing, an occupation which left her thoughts free to wander. Her mouth was drawn into a hard line. The little wrinkles about her eyes were accentuated. Her eyebrows were fretfully raised.

Her unspoken questions concerned Eleanor. Ever since Magnus's engagement to Constance she had found it difficult to entertain amiable feelings toward her sister-in-law. Her jealousy for her son, whom she loved with the blind intensity of weakness, had assumed of late an active and hostile form, which the bond between him and Eleanor only aggravated. What spell did she cast upon men that they should prefer her to a devoted wife and mother? Even William, she reflected, wrapped around, fairly blanketed by his middle-age, had shown his sister chivalrous attentions which he had never proffered to his wife.

Her reflections were interrupted by the entrance of Edmund. He had come straight from the rectory, bringing with him the now declining heat of the encounter. His face had a pallor which his mother always associated with outbreaks of temper.

"What is the matter? Has anything happened?"

"Nothing," he replied sullenly.

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"Don't tell me that. You've been quarreling with some one."

"Not at all. I've only had the satisfaction of telling Magnus what I think of him!"

Her work dropped to her lap. "What do you mean?"

He told his story: his desire to leave Broadhurst in the quest of more congenial work, his application for a position, and the subsequent events. Since he had freed his mind to Magnus, the narrative had become, in a sense, ancient history. The effect upon his mother, however, brought it sharply into the present. She sat up. Spots of bright red came into her cheeks.

"He dared—he dared!" she gasped, her voice shaking with anger.

"He answered their questions. I am at a loss to conjecture how my fame had spread as far as Boston, but this cousin of the Brent family evidently had heard that I was a dangerous character, and wanted to make sure."

"It is outrageous! You are just as good as other young men. It's personal spite on Magnus's part. He has always disliked you from the time you were boys, and you had pocket-money and he had none. Oh, I shall never forgive him this—I shall never forgive him."

"Then I am sorry I told you. After all, it's in the line of his logic. He divides the world into saints and sinners. I am not a saint, ergo! I must be a sinner."

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"I do believe you're trying to excuse him," she complained.

"No; but when I've had my say, there's an end of it."

"Not for me!" She pressed her lips together. Her eyes were dry of tears, which Edmund thought a bad sign. For a while she drew her needle in and out silently. Then she said, "I can't see how your aunt Eleanor allows this marriage."

Edmund blew a ring of smoke before answering. "Perhaps my little cousin really likes him. He's a man of very decent life, you know. He has read a thousand books to my one. He can play the organ divinely. He looks like St. Sebastian. I should think that to the eyes of nineteen he'd do very well."

"They don't know him as we do."

"Well, after all, what is there to know, except that he is a priest first and last. He's bloodless, scholarly, refined, and perhaps my aunt thinks that he could really make Constance happy. She must think so, or she wouldn't sanction their engagement.

An expression secretive, almost to slyness, narrowed Isabel's features. "You never question anything she does. Why is it you've never been curious about her? You always take her for granted."

"What could I do, but take such charming people for granted?" he answered indifferently.

"I don't know why you're so devoted to them," she fretted. "They were strangers to you only a few months ago."

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He declined to look for reasons. She said no more, but from that moment Eleanor and Magnus became as one to her hostility.

Her mood was still upon her when she betook herself that afternoon to a meeting which Magnus's curate had called for the purpose of founding a new guild, and appointing its officers. She made a special effort to attend because he had signified to her his desire that she should become its first president.

The gathering was held in one of the lower rooms of the parish house. Its atmosphere held a faint, stuffy odor of linoleum, matting, pew cushions and prayer books, inseparable in Isabel's mind from the routine of churchwork.

To her surprise and annoyance Magnus came in to conduct the meeting, explaining that his curate had been suddenly called away. If he knew of the latter's plans concerning the presidency of the new guild, he did not carry them out. The name of Mrs. William Hatherley was not brought forward. The office was offered to Mrs. Stilwell, and by her accepted. Isabel, smarting under her knowledge of Magnus's treatment of Edmund, felt this obliviousness of her presence like salt on a wound. Even the minor offices passed her by.

When the meeting was over she lingered, held to the place by her resentment, her mood mordacious and hostile. Magnus, chatting with various groups of women, appeared not to see her. Still she lingered, left quite alone at last in the desert of her suffering—petty, yet acute. Magnus, after arranging some papers

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on his desk, left the room by a corridor leading to the church. She followed him.

He went to the lectern, and took a memorandum from between the leaves of the Bible. Then he turned and looked toward the St. Michael, now placed above the altar where the red light from the swinging lamp might fall on the archangel's face. He closed his eyes at length, and his lips moved in prayer.

"May I speak to you when your devotions are over?" Isabel stood at the foot of the steps leading to the choir, looking up at him with the expression of an inimical animal that is waiting its chance to spring. Her pallor held an under-tinge of scarlet.

Magnus, ignoring the menace in her voice, said mildly:

"Are you waiting to see me?"

"I have been waiting for the last half-hour. I want to tell you that, clergyman or no clergyman, you've done Edmund a nasty turn." She grasped a pew-back with nervous, belligerent hands, and faced him, white and withered with her anger.

"That is probably your honest view of the matter," he answered calmly. "But if you will compose yourself I think I can show you that I could not have done otherwise. Come into the vestry. This is no place for such a discussion."

There was a note of firmness in his voice which compelled her against her will to follow him into the vestry-room. He closed the door and then drew up a chair for her.

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"No, I'll stand. I am not here, however, because I think anything you could say would excuse you."

"I can only say, as I said to Edmund, that I was asked direct questions, and I had to tell the truth. Edmund is one of my parishioners. I have another relation to him than through the family tie."

She laughed angrily. "You've worked hard to save his soul! Well, at least, you don't fool us. You may fool Eleanor——"

"Please leave her name out of the discussion."

"Why?" she demanded.

"I have too much respect for her to have her dragged into a wretched family quarrel," he answered coldly.

"Respect for her! If you knew——!"

The words leaped out—the resilience of years of clamped down and contemptuous knowledge. But the moment they were uttered Isabel looked frightened. She stared at Magnus, her breath coming heavily.

"If I knew!" he cried. "What in heaven's name do you mean?"

She continued silent, her anger swallowed up in fear. Suddenly her words became a key to obscure doubts of his own. The vision flashed before his eyes of Eleanor Valgrave in her Paris room, her face turned mockingly to his, her whole being transformed into shadowy, doubtful reminiscence.

"What do you mean?" He came a step nearer, his features drawn, his body tense.

"Nothing," she muttered, turning toward the door.

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"Come back, if you please. Do you know something, or is this—jealousy?" His usually gentle voice was harsh. Her anger leapt to meet the last stinging word.

"Jealous! No, thank God! I never wanted to be like her!"

"Like her!" he cried. "Take care! take care!"

"You love the truth so much!—well, you shall have it."

Even then she hesitated an instant, but she was already poised for the downfall. Intoxicated with what now seemed to her an inevitable veracity, she went to the end of her logic. In the next five minutes she told him all.

Silence followed, big and dread with the fear that again threatened to overwhelm her. Not looking at Magnus she began to walk toward the door. Her knees shook. Summoning all her strength she walked slowly across the interminable space. At the threshold she looked back.

Magnus had not moved.

CHAPTER XVII

A LONG time went by. The bell rang for vespers. Mechanically Magnus donned his cassock and surplice, and made ready for the service. He went through it for the first time in his life with no consciousness of its meaning. Habit and not will carried him along.

When he returned to the vestry he wrote a note to his father, saying that he might not be at dinner, and sent his acolyte with it to the rectory. Then leaving the church by the side door to avoid an encounter with any of the parishioners, he started on a brisk walk in the direction of the hills. He had a longing to get where he could breathe freely, where he could cry aloud with no fear of answering voices.

He covered five miles before he paused. Even then the place did not seem lonely enough. The very trees made a crowd. He remembered that he was not far from a ravine which cut sharply through these hills, enclosing a stream whose hoarse cry came fitfully to him on the wind. He turned in the direction of the sound and soon came to the brink of the chasm. The trees and bushes that fringed it glowed scarlet in the setting sun, whose beams here and there darted through their foliage and painted with crimson splashes the

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blank gray wall of the gorge. Leaning over the edge he could see the gleam of water and flying flecks of spray far down below. A fancy held him of Eleanor Hatherley wandering as a girl over these hills—alone and fearless, as Thomas had often told him—and coming to some such remote and dangerous place. If by an accident, a chance misstep, she had lost her life there, what a natural impulse of her circle to have seen, not a spirit caught up suddenly pure and unsoiled to its creator, but the extinction of youth and hope. She had not died! She had gone on her way lightly to deeper gulfs, to a profounder darkness.

And the child! He shuddered, and pressed his forehead between his knees. To his excited imagination Constance stood near him, and in her clear eyes he read the sorrow of his own inevitable valediction. She was guiltless, yet the blight of her birth must be in the very tissues of her flesh, in the very veins of her body. He could not transmit that inheritance of evil to children vowed to God from their conception.

The shock of the revelation was, for him, final and unalleviated. He had stood apart from contemporary currents of thought and feeling; he knew nothing, by sympathy, at least, of modern jugglery with the Ten Commandments, of modern re-arrangements of the social order through re-readings of old codes. He did not even admit the compromise of purgatory, but placed heaven and hell in startling juxtaposition, mutually and eternally exclusive of each other.

A feeling of exultation struggled at last through

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his pain. He had the proof now that there is no moral safety outside of the church. Eleanor's radical doctrines, her peculiar indifference to sacred things were seen both as the cause and effect of her disobedience. How could she live so joyously in her house built upon the sands! How did she dare to use a fortune for the benefit of her daughter which had been coined in unholy fires! He trembled as he thought how near he had been to the defilement of placing such treasure upon God's altar. Eleanor's plans for aiding him in his work at St. Helen's would have involved munificent gifts.

He was suddenly conscious of the approach of twilight. The darkness seemed rising from the hollows of the ravine rather than gathering in the sky across whose drowsy expanse birds were flying. But still he lingered. He could not bear the thought of going back to a changed world—to the bitter and lonely duties which were all that remained to him of a romance.

CHAPTER XVIII

LATE that evening Magnus returned to the rectory. His high-pitched emotions had sunk to the level of apathy. He was cold and tired, and had no further aim than to eat his supper by the study fire, and to drink a glass of port. He had begun to think of the glass of port in the midst of his prayers for Eleanor on the bleak hillside. He had thought of it at intervals all the way home, as he trudged through the penetrating night air.

Thomas was reading in the study when Magnus entered. He rose anxiously.

"What is the matter? You look ready to drop. Where were you called?"

"There was no call."

He seated himself heavily in an arm-chair. The youthfulness which a life of religion imparts to the features had for the time been effaced by the pain of ugly realizations. He looked haggard and middle-aged.

"But what has happened?"

"I can't tell you till I've had something. I'm tired out, and chilled through."

Thomas went away puzzled. He did not return at once, for he had read in the priest's face a desire to be alone.

When he re-entered the study an hour later, Magnus

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was still seated by the fire in an attitude of deep fatigue and dejection. Thomas laid an inquiring hand on his shoulder.

"What is it? Can I do anything?"

"No one can do anything."

"You've had a shock."

"Yes."

"Church troubles?"

"No."

There was a long pause, then Magnus spoke in a low, trembling voice.

"I think you might have spared me learning the truth—so late."

Thomas bent forward in his chair, his face suddenly ashen.

"The truth?" he whispered.

"Yes, about—your sister."

"My sister!"

"Yes."

Thomas gazed at him in horror.

"Who—told you?"

"Isabel."

"The jade!—when?—how?"

His clutching fingers were on Magnus's shoulder.

"You hurt me, father. Please sit down. I'll tell you about it."

He told his story. Thomas listened in silence.

"You see where it leaves me," he finished. "I can't carry on—her deception. I can't transmit the evil. I shall have to break the engagement."

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"Don't be too harsh," Thomas said imploringly. "I was that once, to my sorrow. Don't be too harsh. It was no common case. There were extenuating circumstances. His wife had been shut from him in a living death for years, yet he could not free himself. He returned to Eleanor during the siege—she had sent him away a year before—and he found her ill, terrified, starved, all alone in a strange land, with war shrieking under her windows. She would have been superhuman——"

"Ah, but that's just what goodness is—super-human!"

"But think of her alone there. She loved him—and she was young!"

"Sin is sin, father!"

"But Constance is guiltless."

"I admit that."

"Then why punish her? You need not touch a penny of Eleanor's money."

"I cannot marry her knowing the secret of her birth. The only inheritance I can give to children of my own is unspotted life and traditions."

"Poor little Constance!"

Thomas rose and began to walk up and down restlessly. From time to time he glanced at Magnus to detect a possible softening of his mood. He wished in that hour that he had never played the patron in the making of a saint.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN Isabel reached her home she relieved her surcharged emotions by a burst of passionate weeping. Poignant regret stung her for her betrayal of Eleanor. After all, beneath her jealousy of her, she had liked her sister-in-law in a dim, fretful fashion.

Her sole consolation was in the thought that Magnus would never give up such an advantageous marriage. He might suffer, but he would suffer in silence, since through Constance he could attain his ambitions. She debated whether she should go to him and insure his silence, being incapable, like all weak people, of seeing a wrongdoing through, or standing by a blunder.

The sound of her husband's heavy footsteps on the stairs filled her with dread. She rose to lock her door, but her courage failed. It was as well he should know.

He had had a hard day at the mills, and he came in with a sigh of discomfort. A faint odor of machine-oil was about him. Bits of lint stuck to his coat. At the sight of his wife's red eyes he said resentfully:

"Now what's up?"

She began to cry again.

"Come, child," he said in a kinder tone, "tell me what's the matter."

She sobbed out her story. His frown deepened as

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he listened. Once or twice sounds of exasperation escaped him.

"I hope you are satisfied now," was his comment when she had finished. "I hope you are pleased with your work."

"Do you think Magnus will speak to Eleanor?" she asked in a frightened voice.

"No, I don't—not with that fortune almost within grasp; and their plans made. He'll keep quiet. He'll have it out with Thomas, if anyone; but they'll both stand by Eleanor. Thomas leaves the office in a fortnight."

Isabel, quieted by her confession, pondered his words.

"Magnus seemed crushed."

"Well, he'll keep still, though he may act."

"What do you mean?"

"Can't you see that it gives him the upper hand, the inside track?"

"It never gave you the upper hand," Isabel commented peevishly. "Do you think we ought to tell Edmund?"

William ruminated. "It might be safer to put him on guard in case anything did come out; though I don't see how this can go further. Are you sure there was no one lingering near the vestry-room?"

"I don't know," she quavered. "I wasn't thinking of that."

"No. I suppose you thought only of your resentment."

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He wanted to use a stronger word, but he refrained. He walked up and down, not looking at his wife, lest he should be too impatient of her weakness. It was one of the occasions when he realized that he had not married a gentlewoman.

"Are you going to tell Edmund?"

"Are you anxious to have me tell him?" he said sharply.

"He should know what Magnus knows," she answered.

"There was no need for either of them to learn her history."

He pondered over the question of telling his son, and came to the conclusion that Isabel was right. For Eleanor's protection it was better that the whole family should know the nature of the secret they guarded.

After dinner he was closeted with Edmund in the smoking-room. Isabel sat alone, a bit of embroidery in her nervous hands, her ears strained to catch the slightest sound. She wondered what the effect of the story would be upon her son. She had made William promise that he would omit from the record the scene in the vestry, merely saying that there were circumstances which rendered it necessary to tell him the real facts in Eleanor's case.

At last there was the distant sound of the pushing back of chairs. She bent over her work trying to appear composed, but she could not control the trembling of her hands. William and Edmund came down

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the hall together and entered the room. Isabel did not dare look up at once.

"That's a good brand of cigars you're smoking, William," she said, with a little catch in her voice.

"I picked them out," Edmund said, lighting one. "You know, father, that whatever your other talents you can't tell a good cigar from a bad one."

Then Isabel looked up. Edmund was pale, but he seemed entirely at his ease. He smoked and chatted with his father and blew rings of smoke—an accomplishment he excelled in. He rose at last lazily.

"Well, I'm going out for a while."

"To the club?" Isabel asked.

"No; I'm going to take some flowers to Aunt Eleanor. It's her birthday to-morrow."

When he was gone there was a long silence broken only by the ticking of the clock and the rustling of William's newspaper. At last Isabel's curiosity found voice.

"You didn't tell him, then?"

"I did."

"What did he say?"

"Precisely, not one word."

CHAPTER XX

IN the chilly dawn of an October morning, James Sutro was making ready to drive down to the Saturday market. The mass of gloom, in which his lantern made a globe of orange light, was beginning to be distinguished into familiar objects; ricks and pens and friendly barnyard creatures already astir for the enterprises of the day. In contrast to their companionable presence, a cat or two, concentrated and self-absorbed, went slinking away like lean shadows of worn-out revelry. Sutro threw a corn-cob after one of them.

“You imp of Egypt—scoot!” Then he went on with his harnessing, a process interspersed with soft pats on round, warm flanks and velvety noses. The dumb creatures turned large, benignant eyes on him, and fumbled for sugar in the gaping pockets of his coat. “I suppose you are a part of my playthings—according to Mrs. Valgrave,” he muttered. But the farm-toy was already stripped of its gay autumn hues, and in spite of his resolution to find happiness in this work, since he could do no other, he was beginning to dread the long winter evenings companioned with books that only fostered his discontent—tools of which he could make no use.

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His mother of late had urged him to marry, finding something not altogether normal in his obliviousness to the cherry-and-white charms of the neighborhood beauties. She belonged to a generation which began its adult life at the marriage altar. Prolonged juvenility was an eccentric phenomenon.

But Sutro, never greatly attracted by the women of his own station, had now unconsciously consigned them to oblivion. His thoughts dwelt a great deal on Eleanor Valgrave, but in an impersonal way as he might have mused on a poem or a picture. She represented to him the beautiful and gracious aspects of existence in the outlying world of opportunity. His weeks of posing for her had carried him like a ship to foreign shores. He wished to penetrate them.

The horses were harnessed at last, to the relief of an on-looking "hand" impatient of the master's slow, meditative movements.

"All right, sir. Do you want the raincoat?"

"I guess not. It will probably clear toward noon."

The morning mists were rising, but he did not see the beauty of the pictures they disclosed. The utilitarian aspect of nature had been too long thrust upon him for appreciation of the picturesque. He drove down the winding roads at a slow pace, not caring greatly whether he was late, nor how many prospective customers were fuming at his vacant stall. Yet in his ordinary mood he enjoyed the Saturday market, being enough of a farmer to take pleasure in the sight of

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heaped-up produce and in the friendly chaffering between buyer and seller.

When he reached his destination he was greeted with good-natured rallying on his dilatory appearance. He answered that what he brought was worth waiting for; and this indisputable truth silenced his neighbors.

Flaring gas-jets were still necessary to light up dim corners of the market. Each big red apple on Sutro's stall bore a reflection of the flickering flame in its round cheek. He had brought some late chrysanthemums from his garden, and their clean, pungent odor mingled with the smell of fruit.

The buyers were as yet chiefly workmen on their way to the factory, but at the farther end of the market Sutro saw Francis Bradmore. The farmer thought that he looked thin and careworn. Perhaps with all his wealth he was discontented, too.

A group was gathering at a neighboring stall, evidently for gossip. Some piece of news was to be imparted which seemed to be of more than ordinary import to judge from the interested, half-jocular expressions of the men who made up the little crowd. Sutro recognized one of them as an under-gardener on the Bragdon place.

Because of this fact he watched them more attentively than he might otherwise have done. He judged that the story was of a certain class from their whispers and chuckles, and from a chance word heard now and then. These words strung together began at last to have a meaning.

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Its incredible import drew him from his stall. He came to the outer edge of the group within full hearing of what culminated, to end all doubt, in a woman's name. Sutro stood motionless with staring eyes and fading color. Then slowly turned back to his stall.

A simpering country-girl approached him and asked him the price of his flowers.

"They are not for sale," he said harshly.

"Why do you put 'em out, then, you great loon!" she cried, and passed on.

Meanwhile the group was dispersing with mutual good-humor over the frailties of a proud family. Sutro did not notice them. He was looking fixedly at a long, sharp knife on a near-by stall, wondering whether he could steal over and take it unobserved.

Another customer came up. He served him and then his eyes wandered back to the knife. The man who had uttered her name, the man who had spit in the Madonna's face, was still above earth unpunished. He saw him lounging in a far doorway, munching an apple. He watched him closely. After a while the fellow turned and sauntered up the alley into which the doorway opened. Then Sutro left his stall and walked rapidly down the length of the market. His menacing look drew general attention.

"What's up?" someone cried. But he heard nothing. He saw only the man in the perspective of the alley.

He reached him at last.

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"Take back what you said, or, by God, I'll kill you!"

The man turned around in good-humored astonishment. Had this quiet, peaceable farmer gone crazy! He remembered his white face on the rim of the group—a face now sharpened to a menace. The man trembled, but spoke soothingly.

"Lord! Sutro! I can't take back the truth! Jim Parks was under the vestry window diggin' a grave, and he got it straight."

With a cry of rage Sutro threw his full weight on the man, and the two fell together on the stones. They rolled over and over, the farmer emphasizing every turn which gave him the advantage with blows too hampered to do killing mischief, but effective for bruises and cuts. The shrill screams of the women at sight of these, did not, however, reach the deaf-and-blind assailant; and had he heard, he would not have desisted.

The intermittently under-man now began to show signs of retaining that position permanently, and even of losing entire interest in the outcome of the fight. He was of short and porsy build, and the blood-letting had been copious.

Meanwhile several of the farmers had attempted to drag Sutro away; but were in turn pulled back by the women, whose hysterical helplessness leavened the crowd to the disaster of concerted effort. But through it a strong man came at last, pushing a way for himself with sufficient roughness to attain his goal.

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Arrived there, his work was practical and expeditious. After ascertaining that the defendant still breathed and might eventually get up, Bradmore—for it was he—led Sutro staggering to an adjacent faucet.

“You might have killed the fellow!” he said sternly.

“He—insulted—a lady!” Sutro gasped out. Bradmore drew a sudden sharp breath. His keen, comprehending glance was full of commiseration, but Sutro, still dizzy from battle, noticed nothing. Bradmore propped him up against a wall, where he stood in the lonely state of the aggressor. A troop of sympathizers was ministering to his victim.

“Stay here a minute, till I speak with the man. Then I want you to come to my home, and take breakfast with me. I’ll see that your stall’s looked after.”

Sutro was too dazed either to acquiesce or refuse. The fight had been a mere detail; but that bloated lie back of it, swollen until it shut out the light of the sun—how could he grapple with it?

Schemes for such a grapple went through his brain, but in disorder. He wished he could think clearly. Everything seemed unreal, even the market-place. The chattering crowd wore ugly shapes of evil.

The external world resolved itself at length into a smooth, white road and he and Bradmore bowling along toward a friendly haven, which in its turn took visible form as a pleasant room and a warm fire and

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everything shut out, but a host with serious eyes and kind manner, who dispensed breakfast, all the while talking genially about many things, but never once touching upon the extraordinary cause of Sutro's being there.

CHAPTER XXI

THE assault in the market-place was proof only too conclusive to Bradmore that the humbler world of Broadhurst, at least, knew Mrs. Valgrave's story, and was mouthing it with no slight satisfaction. He had recognized the recipient of the beating as a discharged factory hand. William Hatherley's keen and close business methods had made him unpopular with the working class of the town. This man had, no doubt, his own cherished grudge against the head of a family whose pride seemed about to be brought low. How many other obscure tongues might be exulting over this debacle! Bradmore doubted if prominence itself could keep silence in a town on the edge of a dull winter.

The story had reached him a few days before through some chance gossip pieced out by his own keen memory of the vague implication in Remling's letter. His townsfolk were capable of enlarging, unaided, a mere hint of wrongdoing, and Broadhurst, when it waxed self-righteous, could be rude, with that dull, sullen, middle-class rudeness which believes in the open scorn of sinners as the most positive proof of virtue.

When Sutro had left him he sat for a long time in

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deep, motionless meditation. How could he best protect her! The more he thought of the matter the more his sense of his own helplessness was quickened. The soul of scandal is feminine. Against the chain of Broadhurst matrons he could oppose nothing.

Among the women of his acquaintance he knew only one who seemed to him capable of stemming a current of gossip, by sheer force of personal authority; and she had no positive reasons for championship. Eleanor Valgrave's daughter, Bradmore had grounds for belief, was the unconscious cause of the frustration of Gertrude Wayne's own romantic hopes.

He betook himself to her home that afternoon, hoping to discover by observation the extent to which the story had spread. Mrs. Wayne's hospitality included, not infrequently, the latest news of the community, worth telling always to a woman whose round blue eyes opened into such appreciative wonder; and whose infantile coloring made it possible for her still to blush. She had never lost the school-girl's fearful interest in forbidden topics.

When Bradmore was ushered into the drawing-room he found Mrs. Wayne at her tea-table, companioned by Mrs. Stilwell and Mrs. Andrew Stilwell. The three ladies were in that state of obvious good-humor, which may be induced by the enjoyments of five-o'clock tea, but which is more often attributable to the discussion of some subject of more than usual interest. Bradmore did not boast of being a keen observer of the feminine world, but on this occasion it was clear to

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him that the gossip of the market-place had reached the drawing-room. What he had come to learn was written in the somewhat set and complacent features of the Stilwell matrons, and in the embarrassed, mottled countenance of Mrs. Wayne, whose plump hands trembled as she put down her cup to receive him. If further confirmation were needed he found it in the silence which momentarily clamped the three women upon his arrival. To switch from a big subject to trivialities is an exercise in social gymnastics of which only the world-accustomed are capable; and these leaders of Broadhurst society were still in the novitiate of a small town.

Bradmore having accomplished his purpose, and learning that Miss Wayne was not at home, made his call brief. When he was gone the women breathed a sigh in common.

"Do you think he could have heard what we were saying?" Mrs. Andrew Stilwell asked anxiously.

"Heard!" echoed her sister-in-law; "he probably knows the whole story—knew it long ago. Men always do."

"But he's very devoted to Mrs. Valgrave," Mrs. Wayne said innocently.

"Naturally," Mrs. Stilwell observed with a meaning smile.

Mrs. Andrew Stilwell pouted.

"Men always run after that kind of women. It's a wonder to me she doesn't paint. I don't think she ought to dress as we do, and look as we do."

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"She doesn't," said a cool voice in the background.

Mrs. Wayne dropped her teacup with such force that it broke.

"Why didn't you make some sign, Gertrude?" she asked irritably; "stealing in on us like that!"

"I walked in with the normal amount of sound. You were so absorbed——"

"Have you heard about Mrs. Valgrave?" Mrs. Andrew Stilwell questioned.

"Yes," said Gertrude, drawing her gloves off leisurely.

"Isn't it perfectly awful!"

"That depends on your point of view."

"Why, Gertrude!" her mother interposed, "there can't be any question about sin."

"Yes, when sin's proved. But it seems to me that no one has given Mrs. Valgrave the benefit of the doubt. You've all taken a vulgar laborer's story, an eavesdropper, who ought to be horsewhipped!"

The girl spoke with harsh intensity. Something bleak and remote, yet touched with the refinement which suffering imparts, was in her aspect, as she stood by her mother's chair looking down with unfriendly eyes upon the three matrons, in their community of cosy and convenient judgment. Mrs. Stilwell pulled her fur about her shoulders.

"It came from the lips of her own sister-in-law. I don't know what further proof's needed," she said.

"I shouldn't wish to be hung on the evidence of any of my 'in-laws,'" Gertrude answered indifferently.

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"Well for my part I always knew there was something wrong," Mrs. Andrew said with a purr of finality in her voice. "People don't go abroad and stay there twenty years if they're everything they should be."

"In my observation," Gertrude answered, "they stay there so they can become everything they should be. Prolonged residence in Broadhurst is certainly not conducive to the finished human product."

Mrs. Wayne looked apprehensive. She was always afraid lest her daughter's "college phrases" held a fine impertinence; and Mrs. Stilwell was to give a big dinner next month.

"You've read too many French novels, Gertrude," she lamented. "And they always make naughty women seem attractive."

"Mrs. Valgrave is certainly attractive," said Mrs. Stilwell, with the concession of the matron whose blamelessness entitles her to the last damning word. "My husband doesn't think that the church ought to keep the St. Michael—a painting by a bad woman hung over the altar—why, it's scandalous!"

"Take it down by all means," Gertrude said seriously. "And Shakespeare's plays ought to be removed from the village library. I believe he was obliged to marry Anne Hathaway."

"Oh, but he was a man!" Mrs. Stilwell said.

"You do know such dreadful things, Gertrude," her mother bleated.

"I think it's better to know them about people who have been dead three hundred years than about your

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neighbors. What are you going to do in this matter, all of you?" she demanded.

"That's just what we've been wondering," Mrs. Wayne answered. "I'm in favor of receiving her just the same on account of the little daughter. That poor child ain't to blame," she added fervently, relapsing into the vernacular.

Gertrude patted her mother's shoulder.

"Well, my old friendship with Mrs. William Hatherley will be the restraining cause in my case," said Mrs. Stilwell.

"I don't think any of us need lie awake at night mapping out a course of conduct," Gertrude interposed, "since Mr. Brent will soon marry his cousin, and they will go away together."

"But will he marry her—now?"

A bright flush came into Gertrude's cheeks. "Of course, he will marry her. Isn't she just as lovely as she was before?"

Mrs. Stilwell looked doubtful. "I don't think I want Gladys to be much with her—after all, the child has her mother's blood." She rose as she spoke and made ready for her departure.

When she and her sister-in-law were gone, Gertrude drew up a chair before the fire and poured herself a cup of tea.

"I want you, mother, to give a dinner soon—for Mrs. Valgrave."

"Oh, my dear, I can't go that far!"

"You intended to before you knew this."

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"I know, but——"

"Is Mrs. Valgrave a whit different from what she was three weeks ago?"

"Oh, but it wasn't known then!"

"Admirable logic, worthy of a Christian community!"

She said nothing more on the subject. Mrs. Wayne watched her curiously, wondering why she should be so keen to defend a woman whose coming into Broadhurst had upset her own hopes of happiness. The maternal eyes had seen Gertrude's summer-long struggle to regain contentment, as she wandered through Europe, her thoughts too obviously elsewhere. The girl had grown thin and white, but she seemed stubbornly bent upon yielding not one inch to the clamor of her lesser self.

CHAPTER XXII

ELEANOR, making her preparations for the new life which she hoped would fix Constance's future in a firm shape of happiness, had yet her hours of heartache for the old, sweet solitude, deliberately ended by her return to Broadhurst. But she had acted, as always, with the design of going before and anticipating fortune. Constance approaching the social and mating age, could no longer find all her world in the arms of her mother. Eleanor had not waited for the pain of that revelation to be thrust upon her.

She read and destroyed during these autumn days, Godfrey Valgrave's letters to her, except the last one, which he had written from Africa, the only one of length. They were, for the most part, terse, restrained messages with a ring of command in them. Terms of endearment were preciously rare.

The African letter had been written on his deathbed. It began abruptly, ignoring the intervening years of separation, and the last year and a half of silence.

"I haven't much strength left, but I must talk with you to-night before this country settles its account with me. I might wait until morning to insure no fever getting in with the real message, but there may

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be no morning. I have fainting-spells often just before the dawn, and I rather believe I may go off finally in one of them. However, my head's fairly clear to-night, only sometimes the canvas of the tent gets covered, God knows how, with your sketches. The river bank near Dieppe is my favorite. It never stays as long as the others—the old way!

"I long to have you here to-night. I know just how you'd enter the tent. You'd have that look in your eyes, which always came there when you were remembering only that you loved me. You are the one woman I ever knew who could make me jealous of unseen influences. Your conscience wooed you like a cavalier, and I couldn't run it through with a sword.

"You are my wife, Eleanor, and if there be an hereafter, God, who is more just than men, will bring me again to your breast. He knows that we can't approach Him except through the woman we love. But even Paradise couldn't be sweeter than those days in Paris, before your little daughter turned your heart against me. You wanted to save her soul, and you forgot about mine. It is always the interfering child that robs a woman of her joy—changes her into a *mater dolorosa*. I should like a world in which there was no second generation. To make love in such a world would be perfect happiness.

"Here are the violets I promised you—no—I didn't mean to write that! You understand how it is, but I swear the air was heavy with their perfume. Do you remember the day at the Louvre, when we stood be-

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fore 'The Embarquement for Cythera,' and you said those lovers could not be as happy as we, even though the sails were set for the Islands of the Blessed. You wore violets, and the little gray hat that I liked. I wanted to say to everybody, 'She's mine—all mine!' but you had heard already the cry of your child. It was never quite the same afterward.

"There is a great black spider sprawling on the picture—no, it's the wall of the tent. The ugly things come in and stare at me till my man sweeps them down. You could never live here—you hate them so! and they are always lurking on the edge of the shadows.

"What's o'clock! no, don't be frightened! Ah! that hour of reunion, with the red light dancing on the wall—Paris, bleak and hungry and bleeding outside. I had dreamed I'd die of the joy of finding you again; of looking into your eyes, even though they held me away. You resisted me so, fought against me, all the Puritan in you rigid and suffering. I had to conquer not you, but whole generations. No, don't be frightened. I will go if you wish. You are too pale. I'll go. Don't weep so! But have you no pity? I am a soul in hell. Don't weep so! Poor little girl, O! poor, little weeping girl!—sweet, sweet, sweet, oh, great god Pan, piercing sweet by the river, blinding sweet—

"I am alone, and it is growing very cold. There!—that's better; I'm in the tent again. I must keep here. I must write the business down clearly so that you will not refuse the money. You are my wife—you could not refuse it, and there's the child.

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"The woman who bore my name died in England six months ago in one of her periods of insanity. I got the word two months ago through my Cape Town bankers. They will send this letter to my attorney in London. He has my will. He will see that——

"I have made a desperate effort to get to the coast and take ship for France, that I might confirm our marriage at the earliest moment, bell, book, and candle, for your sake only. Our union for me is sacred. But the business—there's a child crying near the tent and it distracts me—no, first, why I couldn't get to the coast. You knew of the expedition and perhaps the papers have told more than I can remember—two years in a hot fog on a steaming river that bred monstrous forms of life in its slime—such rankness of growth—such hateful, strangling trees—I couldn't tell the limbs from writhing things. We were rotted with the hot damp, we came out skeletons all awry and shivering. And I couldn't crawl to the coast. I've lain here a month, each day thinking I could start the next.

"The child has come to the tent door. It's Constance. She doesn't know her father! I'll weep soon if she doesn't smile.

"She's gone again. I don't like it. Do you remember that Shelley saw Allegra rise from the sea and beckon to him just before his death—Byron's little daughter, and she was in her grave. Has Constance died?

"My attorney will make everything clear to you.

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No one will dispute your claim. I have no near relatives. A distant cousin succeeds to the estate in England. I told him of you before I started for Africa. I provided for every contingency, this included. He understands—has money of his own. He always liked me. He'll carry out my wishes—the attorney will see—you must not refuse, you are my wife, Constance is my daughter.

"It is very still again. If you were here I think we would not talk of the stormy joy, but of the quiet after-time when we settled down to a great content. You always filled me with peace. I am too tired to think of joy—but those long, sweet evenings——

"I have slept a little since I wrote these last words, and I feel refreshed. The moonlight streams on the foot of my bed—there's the child crying again! I'll have to get up and comfort her. She must be very near the tent."

The letter closed abruptly. Eleanor, her eyes dim, folded the sheets and replaced them in the envelope.

She sat for a long time with the letter in her hands, then with a sigh of relinquishment, she placed it on the fire. It was safer, after all, to burn it!

A knock at the door brought her sharply back to the present. Constance stood on the threshold.

"Magnus is here, and wishes to speak with you alone." She hesitated. "His manner was very strange to me, mother—almost rude."

"Magnus rude!"

"Or else he is not feeling well."

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"Perhaps he is in a practical mood. You mustn't always look for romance."

She seated herself by the little desk to await his coming. Its empty pigeon-holes gave her a sense of the completeness of her withdrawal from old days, and the shutting-out of old echoes. Yet his voice would cry across her years to the end.

Outside the low, broad latticed windows of the room, the dainty branches of a birch tree swayed in the autumn wind, loosening their gold. The flying yellow leaves tapped against the pane. She listened with pleasure to the delicate sound, with its note of spirituality always present in the phenomena of autumn, the season of relinquishment.

Magnus's footsteps in the corridor broke in upon her brief reverie. He knocked softly and entered softly, and stood for a moment in silence before her, with no sign of his usual gentle confidence. Though he did not say a word, some tragic aspect in his appearance filled her with a prescience of disaster. Her first instinct was to notice nothing. She held out a cordial hand.

"We can be *tête-à-tête* here. Constance told me that you wanted a word with me."

"Yes," he said gravely. "I wish to speak with you alone."

"You do not look well, Magnus. Has anything happened to distress you?"

"I have come to tell you what it is," he faltered.

She waited for him to continue, but he was silent,

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staring miserably through the window at the swaying branches of the birch tree. He did not dare look at Eleanor. He felt suddenly impertinent and intrusive. What in the name of chivalry could he say to her! His accusation seemed fantastic, the fruit of some troubled dream lingering far into the day-hours. Yet this might be a temptation of the evil one—to hold his peace, to make some trivial apology and let everything rest as it was before. The easier road opened invitingly before his tired spirit. Love, good-fortune, ease, importuned him.

Eleanor read the conflict in his face.

"You want to say something to me, and you don't find the beginning," she said kindly.

He hesitated, then ashamed of his moral cowardice he took the knife in his hand and cut the knot quickly.

"I am very wretched. I have come to break my engagement with Constance."

He cast an imploring glance at her. He had gone over this conversation many times in his mind, but never as a suppliant. He was astonished at his own weakness, for he had intended to come to her in full panoply of judgment.

"You wish to break your engagement?" she repeated.

"Yes, Mrs. Valgrave," he replied, not looking at her.

Eleanor knew then that he knew her story. There was no shock in the revelation. That he could escape the truth would be less credible. A sense of relief

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filled her. It would be possible now to lay bare her conspiracy to keep Constance forever unenlightened, to invoke boldly his aid and protection.

"I assume, Magnus," she said quietly, "that in some way you have learned the real history of my—marriage. I hope you heard the story from comprehending lips."

He was too astonished for a moment to answer. There was no shrinking in her glance, no blush on her cheek. He had built his conception of such women upon the bowed heads and tremulous forms of Mary of Egypt and Mary Magdalene. Eleanor Valgrave had the calm of a pagan priestess of strange rites. He was suddenly restored to self-possession. God's minister must show himself stronger than an erring woman. "It matters little in what form I received it," he answered. "I could scarcely believe it. I could never condone it."

"I should not ask you to condone it," she said gently. "It is a matter which, after all, concerns no one but myself."

"And your child," he added.

She turned her head away. He had found his true weapon.

"Deal with me as harshly as you will, but spare Constance."

"I would give the world to spare her!" he cried. "You do not know what I have suffered these past few days—placed between my love and my conscience!"

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"Days!—think of my years!"

He looked incredulous.

"But, if I may say so—your suffering has not been to repentance."

"You are right. I've never repented, if you mean wishing a thing undone. I shall be glad forever that I had that joy, that fullness of life for five perfect years. You can't repent of what has been life to you."

"But what of God's judgment?" he said solemnly.

"I have never accepted man's estimate of God, which makes of him a giant bookkeeper. The God I know blesses joy."

"But you have confessed that you have not been happy," he urged.

She faltered.

"No, where it concerns Constance——"

"That is just it," he cried. "Why should you be unhappy where she is in the question? Why should you hide this thing from her if you rejoice in it and do not repent of it?"

His face was at once triumphant and accusing.

"That's the mystery," she answered. "It's always the third person that makes sin, sin—the child, or the world, or your neighbor."

He shook his head. "If you were alone in the world you could sin just the same against your Maker."

"If I were alone with my Maker, I should know at last what it was to have an easy mind," she retorted.

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He looked for flippancy, but her eyes were tragic.

"I have nothing to fear from my Maker," she went on. "He created nature and I followed nature. What have you to say of this creation of His, which sweeps two people together without permission of Church or State?"

"He made nature that we might overcome nature," Magnus answered solemnly, yet with impatience. He had come to pray and he had remained to argue.

"For thy God is a treacherous God," she replied. "Men, at least, do not put strings across dark stair-cases. But they are nearly always nobler than their deities—except when following them."

"You speak as if we worshiped a fetish."

"Can you deny that the churches have created fetishes in all ages? The priests have always stoned the prophets, and with good reason. Officialdom hates light and the coming of light." Scorn was in her voice.

Magnus grew white. "We are the guardians of God's truth."

"I suppose the high priests said the same when Jesus was brought to judgment. How could they know that the kingdom of the spirit begins when the last letter of the law is written!"

"But there is no license in that kingdom."

"We are arguing like two sophomores—let us return to the practical questions. You wish to break your engagement with Constance because of her birth."

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"I cannot transmit what I believe to be a blot and a stain."

"But she is guiltless—my child is guiltless," she pleaded.

"I know it," he answered softly. "But she is hemmed around with a falsehood, and in her veins—Oh, I can't make you understand! You have had too much success."

"I understand better than you think, and I cannot dispute your point of view with you because it is sincere. It is easy to be sincere when you are narrow—it is easy to be consistent!"

"My narrowness, I trust, is of the path which leads into life," he said with solemn confidence.

"Love is not life to you, then."

"I would give up everything for the love of God."

"I believe you would—for your conception of God. Well, there's nothing more to be said. I am thankful that the child is not in love with you. If she were I'd make you marry her, Magnus." She spoke with a dispassionate calm which made her words seem all the more dreadful to him.

"Don't hurt me. I'm hurt enough. I love her."

"I cannot believe it."

He rose.

"But I obey a higher law than that of my desire."

In her heart she believed his words. His face reflected his acute misery, the fruit of his high and hard confession of faith.

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"Magnus, who told you this? I think I have the right to know."

"Isabel Hatherley. She said something which I could not let go by. I questioned her; then she spoke."

"She has changed the destinies of two people at least! Are you going to speak to Constance? Have you the courage to tell her why you break your engagement with her?"

He bowed his head.

"I cannot tell her."

"You leave me to do it?"

He was silent.

"It is as well. If she is to be hurt, it is I who must hurt her."

CHAPTER XXIII

FOR two or three days after Magnus's interview with her, Eleanor remained closely indoors. A paralysis of fear was upon her, not for herself, but for her daughter. She had a dread intuition that her story had mysteriously spread abroad, though Magnus seemed unaware of such a calamity. Through the still, haunted hours she kept Constance always in her sight, fearing that the very winds of heaven might bring to the girl's ears the ugly tidings. How to convey them herself was beyond both her imagination and her courage. At last she could no longer restrain her apprehensions. She must seek William and know the truth.

She did not have to question him. His face told her all. The rumble of the underworld of Broadhurst had reached him, and he was in full anguish of mortally wounded pride. That his sister's name, through the indiscretion of his wife, should be a by-word in the mouth of the rabble, was a torture for which he found no alleviation. He felt a sudden hatred of both women as marplots in his scheme of existence. His sister's strong will had embittered his young manhood. His wife's weak will had undermined the very props upon which the structure of his pride rested.

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"You know why I've come," Eleanor said, scarcely waiting to greet him. "I need your help. Magnus has broken his engagement, and I cannot tell Constance the real reason. You must stand by me now."

"You'll have to tell her something," he replied harshly. "The people in the street are mouthing your name this moment."

"You mean——" she whispered.

"That someone must have overheard Isabel. The vestry window was open. It doesn't matter how—the story's out! James Sutro fought a man in the market for daring——"

His words ended in a groan. Beads of moisture stood on his forehead. A nervous trembling seized him. Compassion for him swallowed up for the moment her own misery.

"I'll go away, William," she said meekly. "I'll go just as soon as I can for your sake."

"I wish that you had never come back. Did you come back to show that a woman might do as she pleased, and yet prosper?"

His words stung her out of her gentler feeling.

"No. I came back to see if money would buy forgiveness—and it did."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that your clutch on money is tighter than your clutch on your creeds. You married Isabel for money. I came back rich, and I was welcomed with open arms. It is my being found out that is troubling

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you, not what I did. You care only what the world says. I don't care if the whole world knows, if my little girl does not. I would rather die than have her hurt through me."

"Then take her and go! She'd see. She's keen."

"Yes, she'd see," she assented miserably. "William, what shall I do?"

The frightened appeal in her voice moved his softer feeling.

"I don't want to be harsh, Nelly, but I've been nearly crazy these last few days. Isabel's my wife, but she's a fool, and she has done more damage than a sinner. If it weren't for the child I'd say, stay and brave it out, and we'd back you. We'd give the lie to them all; but there are women in this town who have as much bowels of mercy as a cat with a bird. They'd take delight in telling Constance about her mother in every way that didn't say the thing outright."

She trembled. Her hands groped out and clasped his. Their touch was icy.

"I don't ask anything for myself, William, but help me to shield Constance. She is so young."

"I don't know what I can do," he groaned. "Keep her in; don't go to places; don't give people a chance to cut you. Stay away from church. There's no help there now. If you'd gone regularly as a girl as I wanted you to, your whole life might have been different."

She shook her head.

"We are not here for such quibbling."

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"Why not? Isn't your soul still to be saved?" he asked jealously.

"I don't know, William, what my status of righteousness is. I have had two great loves in my life, and I've been faithful to them. What I did was my will to do. I was of the elect."

He gazed at her wonderingly. She looked for the moment the part of one in the secrets of that communion whose mastery of life annuls the standards of the market-place; the communion of saints, of lovers, of poets, seeking each and all the universal harmony, that inner oneness in which both light and darkness find their home.

"You seem honest in your conception of yourself," he admitted grudgingly. "But to me you are not the same woman who used to live in that little room upstairs. You are not as God made you."

"Few of us are," she said curtly. "You used to find life sweet yourself, William."

"I was a bit wild in my youth," he admitted, "but a man's a different proposition."

"You mated then with witches and nymphs?"

He looked at her with alarm. Was she feverish?

"What do you mean?"

"Only that your freedom involved that some woman should not be as God made her."

His sallow face turned pink.

"That isn't an argument; that's—that's an epigram—or something! You were always too deucedly clever, Eleanor. A woman ought not to be clever."

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“Good women ought not to be; but this subject is unprofitable. I must go to the rectory,” she added, rising. “Magnus must marry Constance. He will, if I can show him that it is his duty. He’d be glad to know it was his duty, for I believe that in his way, he loves her.”

CHAPTER XXIV

WILLIAM offered to accompany her to the rectory, but she said that she wished to go alone. As she walked through the garden she was conscious of a wildness in the autumn evening that fitted her own mood. The temerarious winds were abroad and the bare tree branches cracked and swayed, revealing through their interstices the brilliant stars.

As she passed the church she saw that the door was open. She hesitated a moment, then turned and accepted its invitation. Beneath her modern indifference to systems of theology had been always a keen consciousness of infinite and unseen things. Her regret was strong that her early religious training had come to her through a person from whom she had persistently hidden all her better and deeper emotions. Even as a little child her own sense of the mystery and beauty of the world beyond the farthest horizon had been offended by William's smug tabulations; his easy assumptions of what "the Lord" would do in such and such a case; his entire reliance on the respectability of church-going. So she carried on a bewildered, fitful life of devotion of her own, until the great crisis of her life arrived. Then by choice she closed her prayers, having no patience with those who pray and sin. After the birth of Constance her thoughts turned again to

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that City of God, whose towers and battlements, though cloud-like, had never been wholly lost from her vision. She had taught her daughter all that she could of the sweetness of faith, but, inevitably she had taught her also some of the sweetness of doubt.

As she sat now in the warm gloom of the church, her head resting against a pillar, her mind went over all the past with the searching keenness of one overwhelmed by deep gulfs. Had she placed her child on a plane of purity and moral beauty only that in the end she would be all the further separated from her? A cry that was a prayer rose from her torn heart.

After a while she became conscious that she was not alone in the church. Magnus was kneeling before the altar, apparently in deep, absorbed devotion. She watched him, thinking that, if he had been but a little nearer to earth she might have entrusted him from the first with her secret.

The moment, she felt, was favorable for her purpose. When he rose she left her seat and went forward, resolving to use all her tact and graciousness to gain her end. His marriage with Constance alone could protect the girl from rumor. Between the silence of her husband and her mother she could go safely on her way.

Magnus saw Eleanor approaching, and paused at the steps of the altar, his eyes wide and dilated, his form still clothed with the mantle of his prayers. She came slowly toward him with the manner of a petitioner. He did not wait for her to speak.

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"I am glad to find you here, Mrs. Valgrave. I intended to send for you. I have something of importance to say to you."

They faced each other for a moment in silence. Both seemed prepared for a capitulation, or at least an adjustment.

"You have not yet told Constance of my—my breaking the engagement?"

Eleanor's heart leaped with joy. Was he joining forces with her after all!

"No, not yet. I waited—I hoped—" She spoke with pitiful eagerness. He put up a deprecating hand. She must not take too much for granted.

"Come into the study," he said. "We can be free from interruption there."

She followed him with meek aspect, but her mind already dwelt upon the splendid bribe she would offer him to insure both his silence and the marriage. She would further all his projects; bulwark all his ambitions with her ample fortune.

When they were seated on opposite sides of the table, there was a moment of painful embarrassment. Both remembered their last interview in the study, when Eleanor had given her nonchalant consent to his wooing of her daughter. Both were conscious of their changed positions. She was now the suppliant.

Magnus spoke first, his voice low and broken. He did not look at her, but sat with downcast eyes, his head resting against the chair back. He could never be wholly self-confident in her presence.

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"Since our conversation I've learned that this story is common property."

She bowed her head to signify that she was aware of the fact.

"I have felt deeply the bitterness of Constance's position. She finds herself without legal ties, without a name, without——"

"We will waive that, Magnus," Eleanor interrupted, anger stirring in her despite her desire to be diplomatic. Her humility, as she herself well knew, was but superficial.

Magnus took no notice of her words.

"I have prayed and fasted and asked light from heaven," he went on, in tones which still bore the echo of a vigil. "And I believe it to be the will of God that I follow my heart. I love her dearly. I long to take her into shelter."

Tenderness and sincerity were in his voice. Her face shone with the ardor of her appreciation, of her relief, and of her gratitude. She would go the ends of the earth for him.

"I am so glad, Magnus! I could not think that the priest in you would be stronger than the man."

She regretted the words the moment they were uttered. Magnus answered them quickly—hurt where he was most vulnerable.

"My priesthood and my manhood are one, Mrs. Valgrave. I marry Constance that I may bring her into the church—the only shelter."

"It is the only shelter," she agreed, rushing to an

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extreme of diplomacy in her eagerness to cover her first error. "I see that now—too late. I hope that you will do what I have not done. Teach her to labor with you. All that I have can be used for your work. Is it not one of your ambitions to found a chapel whose gates would not be closed day or night? My wealth would be at your disposal."

He closed his eyes to shut out a too-alluring picture. All the advantages of compromise swept in that instant across his vision: unlimited means to further his ends, to render him free of the slow-moving and the doubtful in ecclesiastical matters. Financial dependence upon a congregation tied the hands of a priest, as his experience at St. Michael's had taught him. Eleanor was offering him the opportunity to move swiftly on his way. The struggle was bitter, but his well-trained conscience won the victory. When he spoke again it was with a visible effort, slowly and mechanically.

"I will marry Constance," he said, "but on certain conditions—conditions which I believe necessary for her highest welfare."

Her face paled; her fears again overtook her.

"What are—they?" she faltered.

"First, that she be told the entire truth." He paused, but as Eleanor did not speak, he went on. "Second, that I be allowed to provide entirely for her. As my wife, I should not wish her to touch a penny of your fortune. Third, that—that you do not become a member of my family."

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There was neither rancor nor excitement in his voice, but a calm setting forth of facts. His decision had brought him at last into poise.

Eleanor trembled. Her head drooped.

"What is your reason for the first condition?"

"I wish to begin my married life in truth and sincerity."

"She is true. Isn't that enough?—and the second condition?"

"I could not allow her, as my wife, to enjoy the wages of iniquity. And I could not use such wealth for the church."

"And the third?—my separating from her."

"You have never repented of your sin."

She sat in silence for some moments, her face growing cold and set, her eyes hard. An ironical smile curved her lips at last.

"I still maintain, Magnus, that your priesthood and your manhood are mutually exclusive. But I think the time is near when neither you nor I shall have the right to dispose of Constance's destiny. I shall tell her myself. She shall judge between us."

"The judgment is not between us; but between good and evil," he answered. "Do as you will, but remember, you cannot found your child's salvation on a lie. I shall pray for you, Mrs. Valgrave—and for her."

They rose and stood silently looking into each other's eyes. The wall between them was complete—too complete for even mutual accusation.

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When she was gone he returned to his place before the altar, wracked in spirit, his heart torn and bleeding beneath his outward calm. As he knelt before the St. Michael, he murmured:

"Omnes qui relinquunt patrem, domos, uxorem," and he believed that he was numbered with those whose rejections are the price of the Beatific Vision.

When he returned to the study his stepfather was there. Since the night of their conversation concerning Eleanor, the relations between them had not been wholly open. Thomas's love for his sister stood sentinel for her interests. Both men were conscious that to discuss the subject would be to precipitate hostilities. These days of uncertainty were revealing to them both that their paths under the superficial harmony were essentially divergent.

Thomas was walking nervously up and down when Magnus entered. His stepson's will had always been the stronger, as the older man now realized by his difficulty in putting forth opposition. Sensitive natures are nearly always at the mercy of strength of purpose, even when exercised on a lower plane than their own. But on this occasion Thomas was prepared to give battle even at the risk of defeat.

"I met Eleanor as she came out," he began abruptly. "She didn't even see me! What have you been saying to her?"

"I question your right to ask—especially in that tone." Magnus answered irritably. He had been conscious for days of Thomas's unspoken criticism.

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"I have the right to ask anything which concerns my sister's happiness. Have you come to an agreement with her about Constance?"

"No, I have not. She refuses my terms."

"What were your terms if I may ask?"

"Is it necessary to go over this painful subject?" Magnus said impatiently. "Isn't it enough that she refuses them!"

Thomas stood looking at him in silence for a while. Then he spoke with bitter emphasis.

"Whatever they were, she had the good sense to refuse them. There's that much gained. She's free—at least."

CHAPTER XXV

THAT same afternoon the vestry of St. Michael's was assembled for an informal and unofficial session in the library of Andrew Stilwell's house. As Senior Warden he had convoked his colleagues on his own authority for the discussion of a weighty matter. The meeting was to consider the question of the propriety of leaving the St. Michael in its place above the church altar. Since the story of Mrs. Valgrave's Parisian romance had become generally known not a few voices had murmured against the sacrilege of allowing a painting from her hand to hang within the sanctuary.

"And I think these persons have the right instinct," Mr. Stilwell said after stating the case briefly to his colleagues. "Even supposing they were mistaken, we can't afford to offend anyone's conscience. The chain's no stronger than its weakest link," he added sagely.

"But it's a beautiful picture," said a plain man, a carpenter, whose membership in the vestry was a concession to the democratic element in the congregation. He had done some work for Mrs. Valgrave during the summer, and her graciousness of manner had won him completely. He was eager now to say a word in her defense, but he stood in awe of these wealthy lead-

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ers of social opinion upon whose patronage he was partially dependent for his support.

"Well, for my part," another Stilwell brother commented, "it always seemed to me a very secular piece of work. I believe the artist used a young farmer of the neighborhood for a model—a worthy young fellow enough, but no model for an archangel. I think the true religious spirit would have evolved the angelic being out of—" he hesitated, looking uncomfortable, then wound up—"out of the air."

"That's where angels belong," the carpenter said with a gruff laugh. "But the lady couldn't paint anything she hadn't seen."

"Aren't we straying from the point?" Mr. Wayne questioned. He was a small, plump, happy-looking man, as sleek and content as his wife's perpetual good-humor and faultless housekeeping could make him. He had just come from a delicious lunch, and he was in no mood to strengthen this brew of moral verjuice.

"Isn't the question not what's wrong with the model or the artist, but what's wrong with the picture? It's hung there several months, and I don't see that any of us have gone to perdition," he added comfortably.

Suspicious glances were now cast in Mr. Wayne's direction. It was generally felt among the more discriminating spirits that these sentiments betrayed a low moral standard, or else æsthetic limitations.

"But think of the effect, Mr. Wayne, on the younger members of the church," Mr. Stilwell said sadly. "They know the past personal history of this—this

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unfortunate woman, yet they see us giving a prominent place to a painting from her hand."

"Well?" Mr. Wayne asked innocently.

"Isn't that tantamount to condoning her guilt?"

Mr. Wayne considered the question, then he said with an air of triumph, "Did you inquire into the morals of the bricklayers and masons and woodcarvers who helped build that church?"

The carpenter chuckled, but catching the eye of the Senior Warden, he became instantly sober again. He wished for the moment that he was rich like Mr. Wayne, and could speak his mind.

"The occupations you speak of are all performed by men. The ethical status of a woman is a different matter."

Mr. Wayne had heard contrary doctrine from the lips of Gertrude, and being an impressionable and fond parent, he exploded the one word, "Nonsense!" at the same time reaching for his hat.

"Don't go," said Mr. Andrew Stilwell soothingly. "We need your advice and help in this delicate matter." Mr. Wayne was one of the largest contributors to the treasury of St. Michael's, and must not be antagonized. "I know how you feel. It is difficult in this world to be fair to the flock within the fold, and yet at the same time hold out a helping hand to the sinner."

Then a young physician spoke. He had married recently after a tumultuous adolescence, and he was now keen to guard the sanctity of the home.

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"I agree with our Senior Warden," he said precisely. "I think the retaining of the St. Michael in the church would have a very disastrous effect upon the minds of the young girls in the congregation."

"But an archangel!" Mr. Wayne interposed helplessly.

The carpenter swallowed hard. The physician scowled, but Mr. Andrew Stilwell said politely:

"We must not introduce an element of levity into this discussion. Mr. Brand, what is your opinion of the matter?"

Mr. Brand, a mild-looking man, a prosperous drug-gist in the town, said that he agreed with the physician, Doctor Morton.

"We can't vote on the matter," said Mr. Stilwell, "because this is not an official meeting, but as Senior Warden, I may, perhaps, be allowed to act in accordance with the prevailing sentiments of the congregation. The painting could be returned on the grounds that it savored of Roman Catholicism. Pictures in churches always seem to me to suggest idolatry, and we've already gone pretty far under the guidance of our—gifted rector."

"I must say that low-church practices agree better with the frailties of my constitution," Mr. Wayne said cheerfully, glad to change the subject. "I do not enjoy early rising and prolonged services before my breakfast."

There was a murmur of sympathy. The standard of pious observances, inaugurated by Magnus Brent

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was evidently pitched too high for most of the men present.

"We're going to call a low-church rector," said Mr. Stilwell. "There's no use heating a church all week through the winter for the sake of a handful of women. It's much too expensive, to say nothing of the verger's wages."

A nod of approval went the round of the circle. Most of them were churchmen by recent circumstance and not by tradition. They had followed in the wake of their wives and sweethearts, who had elected St. Michael's to be the sacred center of fashion. It was the women also who had been in the van of the ritualistic movement, captained by Magnus Brent; and they had coaxed and scolded their mankind into ceremonies fatiguing to the flesh. The prospect of a return to the good old once-a-week religion was, therefore, heralded with joy by husbands, who, for all the drilling they received, could not tell even yet why purple should be used in Lent and green in Trinity season.

The discovery of a common bond created a more genial atmosphere. The talk gradually drifted to other church matters, and Andrew Stilwell did not bring forward again the subject of the picture. He had decided to act upon his own authority. Next to William Hatherley, he was the wealthiest man in Broadhurst, and William Hatherley was in no position to criticise on this occasion the rector's warden.

CHAPTER XXVI

LEANOR, hurrying through the chill darkness, felt beneath her suffering the relief of a final decision. She would no longer invoke the aid of aliens to preserve her daughter's belief in her. She, herself, would tell Constance tenderly and with extenuations as sacred in their appeal as flowers from a grave, her whole story; asking through every incident of the narrative for her pity, her comprehension, her own elect judgment. It was far better that the child should read that long-ago romance through her mother's tender interpretation than in the rigid coarseness of the social verdict. The act would require courage, but at least it would end the nervous tension from which even in Paris she had never been entirely free. The liberty of having nothing to conceal spread before her like an air-swept plain. And Constance? Would not her daughter's love, even if bent to the earth under the revelation, come back to her at last?

When she entered the house she went directly to her bedroom to prepare for the evening. Knowing how sensitive Constance was to beauty, especially as expressed in physical charm, Eleanor adorned herself as if for a lover, emphasizing all that was youthful in her appearance.

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The first effect of her design was fortunate. As she entered the drawing-room her daughter came to meet her with a little cry of admiration.

"How lovely you look! You bring the whole city to me in that gown—our spring Paris, white and gold and green."

"Wasn't it after all our real home?" her mother said, pressing the advantage.

Constance reflected a moment.

"It was beautiful; but since we have lived here, it seems almost dream-like, a tale we once read together."

"This small town has been more real to you?" her mother asked jealously.

"Not more real, but it has been good to be with kinsfolk. I began by criticising them all—they were so different; but after a while I loved them—as you wanted me to."

"Yes, I wanted you to. Dearest—" she hesitated, her face paling, "you have not grown too fond of Magnus?"

"It has been a case of suspended emotion," she said archly. "I hope that I may some day love him very much."

"Do you think you could always control your emotions, girlie?"

"I should always wish to," she answered fastidiously.

Eleanor sighed.

"Why do you ask me these things, mother?"

"Because I have something to tell you which con-

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cerns Magnus and yourself, and—and a little story of—my own life.”

“Is there any change in Magnus’s plans?”

“There is a great change. I’ll tell you—after dinner. Let us forget everything now but being together.”

They dined together with real gayety on Constance’s part and a show of it on Eleanor’s. The girl’s delicate, high-bred face framed between the candles seemed on this evening to the mother’s apprehensive fancy as unreceptive of the dramatic realities of life as the entranced countenance of a mediæval saint. Yet how earnestly she had labored for years to intensify that look of remote purity, taking a kind of challenging pride in the achievement.

Throughout the dinner Eleanor talked much of Paris, and the possibilities of life in that city; how, indeed, the bands of convention might be loosened there without loss of dignity; the happy social instinct of the gay metropolis protecting people from their baser selves, even though they trod the primrose path. Constance only half understanding, wholly agreed.

After dinner her mother seemed restless and distrait. She went at last to the piano and wandered into the mazes of complex modern music with its uneasy cries of discontent, its endless, futile questionings. Constance, seated by the fire, listened and watched, wholly drawn into the current of the melody, and vaguely unhappy because of it. At last she rose and went to the piano.

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"Come back to the fire. The music sounds as if you were weeping. I don't like it—come!"

Eleanor rose obediently, and putting an arm around Constance's waist, led her to a chair.

"Now I shall put the candles out, so that we have only the firelight."

"Let me do it."

"No; sit there like a good child."

When the last candle had been extinguished, Eleanor seated herself opposite Constance, and leaned back with a sigh of weariness.

"You look pale and tired, mother. What is this news of Magnus?"

"Must you hear now?"

"Not unless you wish it."

"I promised to tell you. It is important news in one way, for it affects strongly your future—it changes your future."

She paused, hoping for some chance comment from Constance which would make it easier for her to go on, but her daughter remained courteously, expectantly, silent.

"You know, dear," she continued, "that there might be certain aspects of life which might seem to Magnus, with his stern judgment, an obstacle to the happiness of two—" she faltered.

Constance, with her usual directness, went straight to the point.

"Does Magnus wish to break the engagement?"

"Dear!"

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"He has broken it?"

"Yes."

"What is the—reason?"

The words quietly spoken, fell like a thunderbolt.

"The—reason," Eleanor stammered, "the reason has to do with what I wanted to tell you—of myself."

"Mother, you look ill!"

"Listen! The engagement is only half-broken. There are conditions attached now to your marrying Magnus. You are to be the judge! You accept, reject, you judge!"

"I am to be the judge!" she repeated in a mystified voice.

"Yes, after—after I tell——"

The girl rose and came forward. "You are so pale, mother! Has he hurt you—he?"

"Sit down, Constance, and listen quietly. I want to tell you a long-ago story. You know much of it. You don't know all of it."

"But, mother, you look ill," she persisted with tender solicitation.

"Sit down and listen. You remember when and how the only romance I ever had began——"

A lovely smile lit up the girl's face.

"Before the woodfire at Madame Decier's—one like this, perhaps."

"And where it ended?"

"It didn't end," the girl said softly.

"No, it didn't end—but its beauty, its power, its—

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its truth, no one saw—except myself. No one could see except myself.”

“And Constance.”

“After your father met me at Madame Decier’s he came often to see me at my studio. Imagine, dearest, what he must have meant to me! I was only twenty-one. I had lived in Broadhurst all my life, knowing narrow, unsympathetic people. Suddenly into my existence a man comes, the flower of English breeding, yet with nothing insular about him; a man who had traveled over three continents, and lived in most of the European capitals; who was an artist, a critic, a poet, an explorer—who had everything, and was—unhappy.”

“He had everything but you,” Constance commented. She felt vaguely troubled. Her mother had never prefaced her story in this way.

“Yes, and because, with all his worldly indifference he was strong-willed, he set about to win me.”

She sat motionless, but the deep physical quiet was far removed from calm. Her head drooped forward. She did not look at her daughter.

“You could not understand that wooing because you have known only Magnus’s courtship. You could not understand that every faculty, every gift can express emotion without a word of love being spoken. A soul dumb with its passion ransacked its storehouse for treasures to give to me! I became entranced before I knew why. At last—I knew.”

“It was—it was the beginning of my real life. I

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knew the meaning then of prayers said long ago in childhood. I knew why I had loved what was beautiful. I thought of everybody tenderly—even of William. I did not look forward to the future. I lived in the present wholly—and you can only do that when you love and are happy. There is no contentment like it.

“You know the next step—I sent him away.”

Constance nodded.

“I never told you why——”

Nor could she tell now. She had led up to that inevitable door, only to turn faint and sick with fear.

“I must go back a few steps. We went one day to Malmaison, where Josephine lived, you know, after her divorce. It was spring, and the lilacs were in bloom. I spoke of Napoleon’s cruelty to her. Godfrey—Godfrey defended him, and then—and then he told me that he—that he believed in divorce; that he had the strongest of all reasons——”

Her voice sank to a whisper. She glanced at Constance, but the girl’s face expressed only tender interest. The meaning of the last phrase was evidently not clear to her.

“When we went back the world had changed for me. I knew I must—send him away.”

“Just because you wanted him so much—dear little mother!”

“That wasn’t the real reason,” Eleanor said faintly.

“I have always felt it wasn’t the only reason,” Constance answered, her voice sympathetic.

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"I wanted to be good——"

She leaned forward, her elbows on her knees, her chin resting on the palms of her hand.

"Why I sent him away was—was—Constance, he was already married."

"Already married!"

Her voice showed mystification—that was all.

"Then," she questioned, "there must have been a longer time—when did his wife——"

She faltered, the first sign of a dawning comprehension in her troubled accents, but still only a comprehension of sorrow and mystery, not sin. Her eyes were full of expectant tenderness and pity.

Eleanor could not answer. She stared into the fire, rubbing her hands together nervously. At last she began to speak in a low, hurried voice.

"He was away—a long time. He wrote me—of—of—his wife. He had married very young and had been—unhappy. She had violent fits of temper, of jealousy; at last these became fits of insanity. There was some technical reason why he could not be divorced, so he was tied to a living death.

"I did not answer—the letters, though my heart was breaking. I—I loved him!

"I worked along somehow; worked day and night that I might not think. You don't know what it is, dearest, to want someone day and night, night and day—to want his voice, his look—his touch; to be starved, and yet say no, no, no!"

Constance sat rigid now, her face as white as her

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gown, her hands clutching the arms of the chair. She stared and said not a word.

"The time went on, and when the spring came again, the Prussians were surrounding the city. I did not care—I was alone—I could not get any word from home—I was hungry, but I did not care for any of these things. I wanted—your father.

"Then, you know—he came."

"She had died," the girl said in a strained, foreign voice.

Eleanor was silent.

"She had—died, mother—his wife; I mean his wife."

"No."

The stillness that followed was too terrible to be borne. Eleanor began to speak quickly.

"He loved me—we were broken-hearted—I had struggled, and when he came to me that night——"

"Don't go on!"

The cry, shrill and sharp, seemed wrung from physical anguish. Eleanor did not look up. She pressed on doggedly, brutally, making no attempt to adorn the tale, for the horror in the girl's cry had shown her that Constance was face to face at last with its central meaning.

"We were happy—happy as you will never be, because you will never go through death and hell to gain your love. No, I don't mean that—but we were happy; and I can never repent. It gave me you. In another year you lay on my heart. When you were

BOOK II
THE MOTHER

CHAPTER XXVII

BUT you are not to be sad this afternoon. If you will smile we'll show you the fairy cave." "What fairy first showed it to you?" Constance asked.

The boy looked roguish, then confidential. He glanced at his little sister, a sturdy, solemn-faced child of seven years, whose dark eyes had the brooding expression of a philosopher's or of a very aged person.

"It is Wilhelmina's belief that a fairy led her to it one summer afternoon. I humor her because she is so little, and because I'd like to believe in fairies myself. It is the same with her Santa Claus."

"You are a considerate big brother. Let us go to the fairy's cave, if the snow is not too deep. Come, Wilhelmina."

She held out a hand to the little girl, who came forward and took it with a grave graciousness of manner, which, young as she was, made her slightest act significant. The boy ran on ahead, a handsome picture in the rosy light of the winter sunset, which seemed just then reflected in his glowing cheeks and in his large brown eyes. He had no cap on, and the wind tossed his hair about his forehead. Constance, following, wondered how she herself could ever have felt young and free. There had been a time when she had

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thrilled with life as this boy did. Ages, and not two short months separated her from it.

"Miss Valgrave?" a sweet voice piped at her side.

"Yes, Wilhelmina."

"Do you know why I like John best when he's naughty?"

"No, Wilhelmina; why?"

"He thinks of more things when he's naughty. He can think of—of three hundred more new games. When he's good, he just reads."

"But why can't you be good and have fun, too?" Constance insisted. She was morbidly serious these days over trifles, seeing them as significant straws on currents of good or evil. Since coming as governess to these children, she had had in her desert of apathy, one fresh root of strong feeling, the desire to cultivate in them moral sensitiveness. As is nearly always the case, after a whirlwind of devastating emotion has passed over the spirit, she had lost for the time her sense of proportion and her faith in herself and others. A gust of spontaneity might sweep her to the edge of a precipice; beauty might hold subtle, incalculable poisons. The untroubled heart of childhood seemed to her sick fancy only the repository of evils to be.

"But why, Wilhelmina?"

"I don't know why. We've proved it," she answered sagely.

They were now deep in the wood. The sun, a crimson ball, rested on the dark rim of a westward hill. Shafts of its ruddy light pierced the bare tree branches.

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Here and there an icicle, catching a beam, warmed into a ruby.

"We must hurry, children, or the fairies will be gone, and the night gnomes will have come. We're just playing, Wilhelmina," she added reassuringly; "we're playing that there are little green men in the wood with pointed beards and pointed caps, and high, mocking voices."

Wilhelmina shook her head.

"I don't want to play them. I want them really here," she said sorrowfully. "Please say they're really here."

John spoke with his usual sweet authority of manner.

"It's almost dark, so it's best to play they're here. If it were noon we could have them really here. You know you'd be frightened, Will. She's like a different person at night," he said in a low voice of explanation. "Darkness does queer things to her."

"We'll only play the gnomes are here," Constance acquiesced. "Are we near the cave, John?"

"Give me your hand, Miss Valgrave, and shut your eyes—Oh, close, close! I'm the prince and you're the princess, and Will is the page. Wilhelmina, walk behind us and pretend to hold up my lady's train."

"I have it," holding out two tight little fists in mittens. "It is four yards long, and it is blue velvet, spangled with—with——"

"Diamonds," John said. "I'm wealthy, and good to my wife."

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"Play she was once the goose-girl," piped the page.

"Never! Miss Valgrave was always a princess," the boy said gallantly. "Only a step more. Now, if your Highness will be pleased to open your bright orbs."

"Oh, it is pretty!"

The mouth of the little cave was framed in ivy, planted there by some early member of the family, and from the rough stems icicles hung, pushing their clear fingers between the polished leaves. Within the cave two rustic seats were built against the rocky wall. John pointed to a circular opening at the back.

"That is, according to Wilhelmina, the fairy's real home. Now look at the sunset from here."

Constance gazed out with troubled eyes. Natural beauty, like music, hurt her these days with the acuteness of physical pain. The wide western sky with its gold and crimson clouds recalled too many evenings of a tender companionship now passed away, it would seem, forever. John glanced at her solicitously, then slid an arm about her shoulder.

"You shivered! I think it is too cold for you, my dear. A fellow like me runs about and gets his blood up. But a lady can't do that. They always walk slowly like queens. Let's go back. There'll be a roaring fire in the schoolroom and we'll have tea there."

He leaned toward her till his cheek almost touched hers. He was all boy, yet through his gayety and vitality ran a certain poetic strain which made him singu-

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larly sensitive to the moods of maturity, while at the same time it increased his feeling for the wonder and beauty of nature. He always reminded Constance of Wordsworth's boy of Winander listening beneath the stars in a tranced silence to the voice of the mountain torrents. This sensitiveness had been heightened by the recent death of his father. Between him and John, as far as Constance was able to discover, there had been only a slight bond, for the boy had been at school, his father on long journeys. But the child felt the mystery and pathos of this final absence, especially as it concerned the two central figures of the household, his uncle and grandmother. A series of deaths had clothed the latter figure in the robes of perpetual mourning. This latest bereavement had struck the final minor chord. To Constance, her wound raw and bleeding, the house in its deep hush had the comfort of a hospice. Between the pre-occupation of little children and that of a sad old woman she could pass unobserved on her own bitter way.

"We'll go home," she said rising. "Unless you want to put the princess to sleep in the cave."

Wilhelmina looked alarmed. She turned to John.

"Miss Valgrave is not a princess any more. She's coming home to tea with us."

Constance drew the child to her. "You don't want me to be put to sleep?"

"Not till bedtime."

"Well, we'll run home, then. See the thin little moon caught between the tree-tops."

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"It's a good moon. It doesn't stay out all night. That's Uncle Phil's," John added truthfully. "Come, Wilhelmina, see if you can catch me."

They ran on ahead, their sweet voices echoing with a sound of comfort through the twilit wood. They were soon in the broad gardens that swept up in generous curves and roundings to the big, solitary house of Georgian architecture, its windows shining hospitably through the gloom.

The front door opened upon a large hall, hung with portraits of the Mangan family, whose founder in America had been a cadet of an Irish house of rank. The white panelled walls and red carpet, the glimpse at the further end of the hall of a brightly lighted conservatory, gave an immediate effect of warmth and comfort, an impression of a full and happy existence contradicted only by the heavy stillness which prevailed. A sabbatical hush was upon the house, as if the sabbaths of bereavement intermittently dividing the days of hope had been merged at last in a tender but inextinguishable sorrow.

The children rushed upstairs and Constance followed slowly.

"Uncle Phil! Uncle Phil!" they piped in chorus.

A door opened, and a young man of about twenty-four came out. He was dressed in deep mourning, but even the black clothes and the fatigue in his face from a long afternoon of study, could not obscure a certain brightness and alertness in his appearance. He had the look of a scholar, but of a scholar immensely and

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discriminatingly interested in people as well as in books.

The children made a rush at him, and he allowed himself to be captured. Then he turned to Constance, speaking to her with a certain shyness of manner, which was, perhaps, but the reflection of the diffidence in hers.

"I am afraid they have tired you out, Miss Valgrave. I meant to take them off your hands for a while, but I got immersed, and the afternoon was gone."

He nodded over his shoulder at the litter of books and papers on the study-table.

"You are a hard student it seems," she said indifferently.

"This should have been done in France. I was to go there this year to take my advanced courses in civil engineering; but when my brother died, my mother wished me to remain here a while, and be a kind of guardian to these youngsters."

"Of course. She is lonely," Constance murmured.

He was silent for a moment, wishing to say something genial and natural that would break the formality between them. Constance had been a member of the household for several weeks, but she remained as reserved and unapproachable as on the day of her arrival. Her abstraction, her obliviousness of his presence, which he thought at times scarcely courteous, at once piqued and interested him. He would have been glad of at least enough friendly response on her part

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to insure him some modicum of her companionship during a long solitary winter in an isolated country house.

"It was a disappointment—my remaining here," he said, reaching out unconsciously for her sympathy. "I was keen to go to France. I understand you were educated there, Miss Valgrave."

"I was educated there," she said hastily, at the same time holding out a hand to the little girl. "Come, Wilhelmina, it's almost your supper-time."

"Let the nurse give her her supper. My mother particularly desires that you should not be burdened with tasks that are not—appropriate."

"But they are pleasant."

She led the little girl away, wondering, as she had on other occasions, over the consideration which this family showed her in every detail of her life with them. She was grateful for the delicacy of their attitude, but she sometimes feared lest its logical conclusion should bring her into friendly personal relations with Mrs. Mangan and her son; while what she desired most was to do her work unnoticed and alone. She would have scoured pots in the kitchen willingly, had this occupation guaranteed her the boon of being forgotten.

She attended upon Wilhelmina in the gay, warm nursery, which always seemed to her quick with the dainty spirits of the many children for whom it had been the first chamber of their house of life, or their only earthly dwelling. To her sore heart it was the

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most companionable place in the old house. The big, rambling library brought no solace; recent events had given the lie to the idealism of the poets; fiction abounded with reminiscent stings. But the nursery was peopled with quaint, innocent, homely objects suggestive of no known world but a child's own planet, swinging through golden air. The battered dolls, the stuffed animals with an unsmiling Noah, the Kate Greenaway pictures on the walls of grave little girls and boys, as sweet as flowers in a formal garden, even the capacious sagging chairs like warm broad laps had all the comfort of a shelter unvisited by adult heaviness. She spent many evenings there while Wilhelmina slept in an adjacent cubicle, the intervening white dimity not shutting her too completely from Constance's yearning but reluctant tenderness.

On this evening, the little girl, bathed and night-gowned, and brought to her by the doting and tyrannized nurse, was disposed to conversation. She seated herself on the bear-rug, her pink toes half-buried in the warm fur. While she talked she regarded Constance with an intense steady gaze, not childlike, yet not precocious.

"Are you an orphan?" she asked at last with polite interest.

"My mother is living."

"Mine died when I was born. We just missed each other."

"Are you sorry, dear?"

"No."

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"Why not?"

"Because now I can play she was all kinds of ladies. I changed her almost every day—till you came."

The last words were spoken with soft flattery.

"But I could not take her place."

"You didn't."

"Then why—" she hesitated. This child had the power to embarrass her.

"You were something new to think about—and—and you've stayed new. Miss Sands, my governess last year, stopped being new the second day—and," she added, making a gesture of distaste, "she was always wanting to kiss me. You have never asked me for a kiss."

"I shouldn't ask you if I wanted to kiss you; I should do it."

"Ah, then you haven't wanted——"

The little voice trailed for a moment into discontent. A dimpled hand was laid on Constance's knee.

"It's just as well—" philosophy was evidently gaining ground—"I have heard that it is not sanitary."

Constance's laughter was her first reply; then she turned as suddenly grave.

"It might be that I do not wish to care for you, because I may be with you only a short time. I should feel so badly then, when I left you."

The child meditated. "I think I understand; but let's play you are going to stay, so that now——"

She held up her mouth.

When Constance went to her room she found a

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letter on her dressing-table. The sight of her mother's handwriting, though infrequent, sent always a chill through her of distress and dread. The writer had become a stranger, between whom and the worshiped playmate of those old Paris days, was the distorting glass of a lifelong lie. Duty required that certain forms should be gone through with, and once a fortnight Constance wrote four pages of dry facts to her mother. The replies were equally mechanical, with this difference, that they held the stillness of repression, not apathy.

She opened the letter with trembling fingers and began to read:

"I am at last in my new quarters in the Sutro farmhouse. I have a whole wing to myself, with good north light in one room for a studio. I have stored my things, and furnished all the rooms with cottage furniture and cretonne hangings. I spent hours choosing the patterns, not because I cared in the least, but to keep my mind occupied. I wish I had a hundred houses to decorate instead of a suite of rooms. I could not endure them if they did not overlook such wide prospects. Mrs. Sutro has evidently only consented to my coming here because of her son's strong wish in the matter, and because I have given her the St. Michael. *N'importe!* it suits me, and as I find prejudice everywhere, it really doesn't matter. After the cut of a sword, pin-pricks are nothing."

Constance drew a sharp breath. These allusions stabbed her through and through. Yet the former

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silence was even more painful. In those last days after the confession and before the physical separation of two whose souls were asunder, it was part of the anguish that nothing was said. Constance's only commentary on her mother's story, was to make immediate preparations for leaving Broadhurst, for earning her own living, that she, even as Magnus, might not touch in the future a penny of the fortune. She did not have to steel her heart against Eleanor's supplicating eyes and imploring voice, because look and voice reached her across a wide annulling distance. She had but one active emotion—to get as quickly as possible from under her mother's roof.

“Edmund comes often to see me,” the letter went on, “and so does Thomas. The question of Magnus's going to St. Helen's still hangs on. He renounced much for his convictions. I have not seen him, but your Uncle William tells me that he is not looking well. Gertrude Wayne is one of my most frequent visitors. She seems entirely unaware that I am a 'separated' person. We often take walks, but I never go to the town. It is not that I care for myself, or that I wish to spare William, but I cannot walk the streets where we were——”

The letter dropped from Constance's hand. She sat for some moments motionless, then impulsively she took the sheets of paper and laid them upon the open fire without finishing what was written on them.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MRS. MANGAN was of a type growing every year rarer in a society which has agreed to ignore old age as an irreligious delusion. Her look, her bearing, her dress witnessed to a consciousness of relinquishment, indicated an honorable withdrawal from certain activities of existence, as well as a recognition of the benefits and privileges of the autumnal period. Constance had met matrons of the same stamp in France, but not in America, where the levelling tendencies of a democracy seemed to merge even the generations in a monotony of youthfulness.

To Philip Mangan his mother was the most wonderful woman that he had ever known. The child of her middle-age, she had always been to him mysteriously wise and her maturity a tower of strength. Many sorrows had contributed to its building, the loss of her husband, the loss of sons and daughters. Philip alone was left to her, and she had besought him to remain with her until the tyranny of this latest bereavement was overpast.

The half-hour before dinner he spent always in her company. On this evening he was walking up and down the drawing-room, restless after his long session

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of work. Mrs. Mangan, watching him, wondered how soon the house in its hush of sorrow would become too narrow for his strenuous spirit.

His face brightened as Constance entered. He had been afraid that she might excuse herself from dinner as had happened once or twice before. She came slowly down the long drawing-room, a congruous figure against its old-fashioned yet stately setting. She was in a white dinner-gown, but she wore it with none of the unconscious coquetry of a young girl—merely as an accessory to the hour and place.

Constance herself dreaded these evenings in the drawing-room which was eloquent of many inheritances once believed a part of her own life, high traditions, ordered peace, tastes and preferences peculiar to a family conscious of its solidarity and worth.

"Are those children 'playing' they are asleep?" Philip asked.

"They do that as thoroughly as they do everything else," she answered.

"I want them to be whole-hearted in their work and play both," Mrs. Mangan said, laying down her book. "If there is anything discouraging in this world, it is a child without enthusiasm."

"My mother's plans for their education are very simple. She wants Wilhelmina to learn the collects and know French. She wants John to know American history and all the outdoor sports. That is the program—eh, mother?"

"You may jest if you like. If a young girl be

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religious, and a boy manly and patriotic they are already educated," his mother said.

"Aren't you going to send Wilhelmina to college, then?" Philip asked.

"Not in my lifetime. I want her taught chiefly to be gracious and helpful, and women do not acquire those virtues through the intellect."

"But doesn't all teaching have to rest on their poor little foundation of experience," Constance said timidly. "And then life sweeps it away."

Mrs. Mangan regarded her attentively. She had divined from the day of the young girl's arrival that she had a secret grief, the result, it was probable, of some rude awakening to the realities of existence. She knew little of her personal history beyond the fact that she was the niece of a manufacturer in a distant town, and that she had been educated abroad. But Constance's personality, her high-bred look, her air of distinction had weighed more with Mrs. Mangan than accomplishments and letters of recommendation.

"Of course life tests instruction," she answered; "at least in the boy's case. The normal girl should pass from girlhood to marriage with her ideals unshattered. In my old-fashioned judgment, early sophistication is one of the great evils of modern life. Unless our children see visions our nation will perish."

A tremor of earnestness was in her voice. Such doctrine would have appealed to the Constance of six months ago, as the very mainspring of her own train-

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ing. Now it seemed to her but the theoretical musings of an abecedarian—a woman, who for no merit of her own, had been sheltered and protected always from the harshness of existence. Her delicate face grew hard. Philip who watched her more closely than he realized, saw that for some reason the subject was distasteful to her, and he hastened to change it.

“I rather exaggerated the narrowness of my mother’s system of education. It also includes the classics as I know from an early and tearful acquaintance with the Greek grammar.”

“I am aware that the classics have been banished by this generation as having no bearing upon money-making,” Mrs. Mangan said dryly.

“But mother, if the sons have leisure to study the classics it means that some father or grandfather didn’t.”

His mother’s smile was her only reply. Philip turned to Constance.

“Don’t you think, Miss Valgrave, that to make a minority mellow a whole world of struggle and sacrifice has first to be?” He spoke with boyish earnestness. It was evident, though pleasingly, that he was just out of college, and in full tide of youthful speculation and judgment, privileged by wealth and perhaps by fastidiousness of temperament to approach life by the pleasant roads of theory.

“The warfare and sacrifice are real enough,” she answered. “I don’t know whether the mellowness ever comes.”

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Her indifferent manner piqued him. He knew that she was four years younger than himself, and should be in all fairness, as keen for argument as he was.

"You young people go in imagination to meet all the troubles of maturity," Mrs. Mangan said. "When I was young I no more questioned happiness than I did sunshine."

Philip made another venture. "I imagine that Miss Valgrave—like myself—sees the night-side through the mind. It's dramatic, not personal."

He had great hopes of this setting forth, but now dinner was announced, the interruption to one of the group most welcome. Philip gave his arm to his mother, and Constance followed them, wishing that the only formal meal of the day were well over. The very room in which they partook of it oppressed her. The walls were hung with portraits of the Mangan family, mute witnesses of an unbroken and honorable line. The pride of the race so lately hers was strong in these living descendants, yet, like most justifiable forms of pride, it came rarely to the surface, was felt rather as an engine of rectitude in the conduct of daily living. But it continually oppressed Constance by its reminder that her own existence had been drawn from a polluted source.

Philip, glancing at her from time to time between the candles, wondered if his careless questions had awakened in her some sad memory. He was oversensitive to the moods of others, especially since the death of his favorite brother had heightened all his

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perceptions, grief being like joy, destructive of the obvious and favorable to the discovery of the real. He now sought a way out of the difficulty by returning to it.

"You must pardon my desire to draw you into a discussion, Miss Valgrave, but I have been thoroughly spoiled. My room-mate at Harvard preferred the Socratic method of investigation to any other. We used sometimes to talk half the night. Since I've come home my mother humors me."

"And I generally get the worst of the argument, because I proceed from experience, my son from logic."

"But the delight of arguing with my mother is that she never remembers, or else she chooses to ignore, what you said the day before. You can always start anew with her without being afraid of contradicting yourself. She holds out a fresh chance."

"That is beautiful," Constance said wistfully.

"I learned years ago how disagreeable a certain kind of memory can be," Mrs. Mangan said, "when I was living in a circle which had a firm clutch on the riff-raff of daily conversation. But you meet them everywhere—the people who remember a mood or a chance word of another, and stamp it with finality."

"The people who see the clown, never the god," Philip interposed. "But don't we all have to go through the stage of clown-seeking? I have myself dim recollections—" A smile flickered over his face.

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"If it be a step to the god-seeking, well and good; but many of us sit down on the step," his mother answered.

"While the clown under examination slips past us and enters the temple—*et ego!*"

Constance in spite of herself was being drawn into this current of half-serious discussion which she suspected Mrs. Mangan of joining in chiefly for her son's sake. Philip, with all his learning, seemed delightfully linked with his small nephew asleep upstairs. He was still in boyland. His dark eyes were only trained to a look of indifference. Beneath lurked both mischief and tears.

"Fortunate clown," she said, an unusual spontaneity in her voice.

"To escape my microscope?" he hastened to greet her change of mood.

"No, to get into the temple."

Philip looked at her intently. "Some persons are born in it—they are beyond the microscope," he said.

Mrs. Mangan looked intently at Philip. She had her own plans for his future which by no means included haphazard romance. She was glad that Constance Valgrave seemed so little inclined to pass her barrier of reserve, which was strong enough, Mrs. Mangan thought, to counteract what youthful charm she might possess for a man in the perilous twenties, a period not yet triumphantly adult—and therefore liable to the tyranny of dreams!

CHAPTER XXIX

WHATEVER the shortcomings of the American nation, among its peculiar merits is its assumption of the innocence of youth, and its right to freedom on that basis; reversing the European standard which presumes in adolescence a bias toward evil and believes fully neither in the innate modesty of the maiden, nor the spontaneous rectitude of the boy. The result of the American point of view has been that in every community there are young men lacking in no manly quality, whose wholesomeness of nature takes the clear paths with the sane instinct of happy and intelligent beings. Philip Mangan was of this type. Though full of vitality and good spirits, he yet remained an onlooker, unspoiled and without the delusion that the actor is necessarily he who acts.

He was frankly romantic, believing in women as the best men in all ages have believed in them, even when suffering at their hands. He had fallen in love many times during his college years with the usual types, girls pretty or gay or clever; and written the usual verses to them, but he had graduated among the free. Since his return home he had determined to put aside his aspirations concerning marriage until

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such time as he had taken his advanced degrees in his chosen profession. The death of his eldest brother strengthened this resolution by turning his thoughts to nearer responsibilities.

Constance's entrance into the family life had brought within his daily observation a young girl of a type unfamiliar to him, used as he was to self-conscious beauties who demanded full tribute of attention, or to clever college women who were ready to discuss anything with him from the Russian autocracy to the latest novel. Constance, remote and mute, seemed to think no discussion worth while, and of her beauty she was unconscious. She stimulated his imagination continually, as it had never been stirred when he had found every thoroughfare wide open.

The day after his endeavor to draw from her some revealing doctrine he found that his mind wandered from his work continually to her. Why was she unhappy and mistrustful at an age when most girls are chasing butterflies. He wondered what he could do to change her mood—if mood it were. Finally he put down his books and betook himself to the children's schoolroom. He was conscious—to his annoyance—of a feeling of timidity as he paused upon the threshold. What excuse could he make for coming? This was her domain and she might question his right to enter it. He had seen no signs in her of the diplomatic spirit. He cast about for excuses—to consult the dictionary or to borrow a pen.

He was surprised and pleased to find her alone,

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working over some exercises. She looked nun-like in her straight black gown and, despite her grave manner, too youthful for her office.

"May I consult a book here, Miss Valgrave?" he said with formal deference.

"Certainly."

She looked up for an instant, then went on with her writing. Philip had the normal amount of vanity. His handsome boyish face, bent over the book-case, wore an expression of discomfiture.

"Does my being here disturb you, Miss Valgrave?"

"Not in the least," Constance said without looking up this time. She was absorbed in a problem of algebra, which she only half understood.. Mathematics had never been her strong point.

Philip began to be amused, wondering how far he was identified in this girl's mind with the tables and chairs. He sat down without further speech and opened a book, read for a while, then looked in her direction. Constance was still writing, her brows drawn together with the intensity of her attention to her task. Yet even in this prosaic setting he thought her very lovely. He turned reluctantly again to his book.

Out of the half-hour of silence which followed one fact emerged clearly—his sense of pleasure even in this mute companionship with her. After his first embarrassment and the resignation of his vanity he was glad to be there though unnoticed. He rose at last and put the book in its place with elaborate care. Con-

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stance was not writing now, but sat with her forehead propped upon her hand in an attitude of perplexity.

The drooping lines of her figure and the solitariness of her aspect awakened a chivalrous feeling in him which for that moment at least was free of egotism. She seemed too young to be alone and self-reliant.

"Pardon me, Miss Valgrave, but don't you think you should get a breath of air this lovely afternoon? Mayn't I show you one of our views? The hill is not far from here."

"Oh, I couldn't go!" she exclaimed with what he thought over-emphasis. Her manner was startled—at once upon the defensive. She seemed to him at that moment like a person with something to conceal, but her face turned to his had the transparent innocence of a child's. Who and what had hurt her?

"Why not?" he asked at the risk of discourtesy.

"I have work to finish."

"Is it so very important?" he said with a smile.

"What are you doing?"

"Some problems in algebra."

"And don't you understand them?"

She flushed brightly.

"No, I don't very well. I confess that John is a better mathematician than I am."

He drew near the desk.

"Let me help you. I have a kind of knack that way."

He did not wait for her to refuse, but seated himself beside her, becoming at once impersonal and atten-

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tive to the matter before him, the better to reassure her. He had made up his mind that this girl was well worth knowing, worth the full tribute of the tact and patience he must use to win her friendship.

He was a good mathematician and had moreover the faculty of imparting his knowledge. Constance, listening and comprehending, grew more and more at her ease. His elucidations indeed lifted a load from her shoulders. She had feared lest this deficiency of hers might become known to John and through him to Mrs. Mangan, perhaps imperiling her position.

"You've made it all clear," she said gratefully and with more warmth in her manner than she had yet shown. "One should know so much more than one's pupils, and in this subject John is abreast of me."

"I doubt it, but don't let it worry you, Miss Valgrave. You saw last night how lightly my mother holds these matters."

"Yes, but I must fulfill my duties," she answered.

That she should be morbidly conscientious seemed to him a part of her sensitiveness, but it pleased him. Philip liked people who guided their conduct by high ideals of duty. The others might be more interesting—often were, but they were not so trustworthy.

"You more than fulfill them," he said. "Mathematics aren't easy. I wish you'd come to me whenever you get in a tangle or send for me. I can generally find the trick."

"I shall be glad indeed to come," she replied, appreciation of his kindness in her eyes and voice. His

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aid and his sympathetic understanding of her limitations had created a bond between them. Though she did not realize it his youth had called to her youth for confidence and trust. From that hour onward she was more at ease in his presence, though she took little note of his overtures in the direction of a fuller, more personal acquaintance.

CHAPTER XXX

IT is Mr. Bradmore, ma'am."

"I will come down in a few moments—no, show him into my sitting-room."

Mrs. Sutro moved slowly away, the look of non-comprehension in her face, which was beginning to affect Eleanor more disagreeably than open criticism. This farmer's wife was one with the leaders of Broadhurst's society in her complete change of attitude since the bruited abroad of a *maladroit* romance. She had received Mrs. Valgrave into her house for her son's sake, but this very reason, Eleanor saw, held for the mother its own acid.

Bradmore, waiting in the sitting-room, wondered why a place of such gay furnishing should seem so empty, but the chill that reigned was more moral than physical. The very order was forlorn, as if every article had been arranged and rearranged by restless hands reaching out of some vacuum. He realized that the woman who dwelt there had been spiritually marooned—but not by Broadhurst. Some deeper verdict than that of conventional society had created this solitude.

When she entered he came forward eagerly, determined that on this occasion he should not be restrained

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from speaking of the subject dearest to him, by Mrs. Valgrave's preoccupation. As she greeted him he saw that it was still like a cloud about her, manifested even in her physical appearance. Her hair had lost its luster, her skin its clearness. Yet she was beautiful in a dim way. He longed to evoke her from her shadows.

"Did you ride up?" she asked; "I thought I heard a trotting horse."

"No, I walked. It is cold, but the air is bracing."

"It is always cold."

She seated herself opposite to him, her hands lying palms upward in the lap of her black gown. Something indifferent and resistless in her attitude made it difficult for him to begin.

"I am not, to-day, stopping in the porch of the preliminaries," he said abruptly. "You know what it is that I want above everything in life. This is not the first time that I have told you."

She raised her eyes to his. No trace was in them of the self-consciousness of the wooed woman.

"I am sorry—deeply sorry. I wish that you could forget me, even though I lost a friend."

"Is that your sole answer?"

"What else can I say? Would you want me to marry you not loving you? That would be a lie!—my soul is sick of lies."

"You are very unhappy," he said gently. "Surely this buzzing of flies——"

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"Do you think for one instant," she answered, raising her head proudly, "that anything matters, except—oh, no, you could not understand."

"I think I have understood," he said patiently.

"I know! You've been beautiful. You have gone on evenly in your friendship, looking neither to the right nor the left, taking me with no backward glances, and the most I can do in return is to say that I thank you from my heart."

"I wish that you would let me take you out of all this, take you to the circles where you belong in London, or Rome, or Vienna."

"You omit Paris."

He flushed youthfully. "You need not be so bitter with me."

"Forgive me! I am alone so much that I know only two people, myself and my enemy, the world."

"Broadhurst—a small world, and friends even in that."

She smiled sadly. "I cry as Magda did, 'Why did I ever come home!' Why is it," she went on, "that across a great distance of time or space everything looks fairer? You forget people's faults and remember their virtues—why, it's like death! Then you return and find them after all just the same; no worse, perhaps; but no better."

"Your coming back was your second quest of the ideal," he said tenderly. "Come with me now, and let us begin another journey together."

She shook her head. "I should not be happy—and

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you would be miserable. I am afraid I should make you miserable. Nothing matters, except—oh, you cannot understand!”

“I do understand. You long for your little daughter.”

His words released her tears. She rose and went to the window, turning her back upon him while she wept quietly. Bradmore stared into the fire, wretched, as most men are in the presence of a weeping woman, yet relieved that her tears could still flow. Her usual apathetic calm held for him a morbid element. He was both jealous and afraid of this maternal passion, fixed forever, it would seem, in some marmorean mold of grief for a dead child no living child could ever supplant.

“If there is ever anything I can do—” he faltered.

She shook her head. “There is nothing—forgive me! You climbed these hills to see me, and I have given you a poor welcome. I wish I could show you how much I appreciate your—friendliness.”

He winced at the word. “I am more than a friend to you. You speak of your coming to me as something untrue. It need not be, if I understand your feeling—and there would be always the blessed hope of its growing into love.”

He leaned forward, his features transformed for a moment into the spiritual kingliness of the lover. Eleanor turned her eyes away. She had seen that look in another’s face.

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"Can't you understand," she said, "that I have had one great love in my life, and on my being faithful to it depends my wifedom?"

He rose. "I can't understand, but I accept what you say. You make everything true for me."

"I wish I could make everything true for myself," she answered, "but I mar all that I touch."

"You are morbid. Try to believe that you are what you really are, a noble woman," he pleaded.

"Only one person in the world could make me believe that, and I have lost her faith."

"She is young yet. Wait!"

"I am afraid that I shall die waiting," she answered wearily.

"You will not die while I am near you," he said doggedly.

"Would you wrestle with death itself on my doorstep, like Hercules for Alcestis?" she commented with a faint smile. "But her own love helped to win the battle."

"Mine would be enough."

He bade her good-bye, and went away heavy-hearted. At the door of the farm house he met James Sutro.

"Are you going the short cut home, Mr. Bradmore? May I walk with you? I want to speak to you about —Mrs. Valgrave."

Bradmore nodded assent. The two men started off across the fields with a long, swinging stride. Since

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the fight in the market-place there had existed a strong bond of sympathy between them. That morning had made them friends.

"What I want to say is this," Sutro began awkwardly. "I am worried about Mrs. Valgrave. She can't go on this way very long. We hear her pacing the floor, moving about nearly all night. She doesn't eat enough to keep a bird alive. And I don't—I don't think her people—realize it. They come up to see her, but they don't go away looking worried—as they ought! They don't seem to understand she's ill."

"And if they did, what could they do about it?"

Sutro for a moment looked taken aback. Then he said:

"They could do nothing."

Bradmore abruptly changed the subject. He was in no mood to discuss Mrs. Valgrave's needs with the young farmer.

Meanwhile Eleanor had gone to her desk to begin a letter to Constance. The letter was not to be sent for three or four days, but it had always to be written and re-written, until its lifelessness had been galvanized into a semblance of life.

She bent over it painfully, but had not gone beyond "Dear Constance" when a knock at the door announced William. He came in breathing heavily and bringing with him an aura of cold air. He drew off his fur gloves and took off his overcoat; then, uninvited, drew up a chair to the fire.

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"I have not yet asked you to be seated," Eleanor said, her voice trembling a little.

"Why, what's this? You're nervous!"

"I'm not nervous. But ever since this trouble began you have been discourteous. You've become again the brother I ran away from years ago."

"Do you want me to send up my card?" he began hotly.

"Better that extreme than this. You stalk in and lay down your little law to me and stalk out as if you were a—" she hesitated for a word, then brought it forth with emphasis—"a philanthropist."

"I hope I am one. I have wanted all my life to turn you into the right path, to guide you to a safe haven, and all my life you have thwarted me."

She was silent.

"I have brought you a message from Isabel. She wants you to come and make us a visit."

"Are your neighbors beginning to criticise you?"

William knit his brows, honestly puzzled.

"This isn't like you, Nelly. What makes you so caustic?"

"Caustic! Isabel robbed me of everything—of my name, of my child—to satisfy her petty grudge against Magnus, and now to stop further gossip, she wants me to visit her. Why didn't she come herself to ask me? Why did she send you?"

"To tell the truth, she's not as well as she might be. I think she has worried a good deal about this matter."

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Eleanor made no comment.

"You don't give us credit, Nelly, for planning for your good."

"My good! No one ever did me any good except my—except Constance."

"Why don't you go and live near her, then?" William inquired suspiciously. "Why do you stay on here? Have you quarrelled?"

Eleanor pointed to the desk. "I am just beginning a letter to her—does that look like it?" she demanded.

"People say——"

"It's a lie!" Her vibrant voice filled the room. William put up a warning hand.

"Be careful. Some one will hear. Nell, you don't act like a lady these days."

She shivered and put her hands before her eyes. "I know it! I know it!"

"If I were you, I'd go to Constance—live quietly near her."

She shook her head. "I'm not a coward. I must stay here."

"Why?"

"I don't know; but I must."

"People would forget sooner if you went away."

"I don't want them to forget. I want them to understand."

William looked puzzled.

"They'll never take you in again, I'm afraid."

"That isn't essential."

Silence fell between them. William broke it.

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"Magnus goes to St. Helen's in April—at last."

"What has been the cause of the delay?"

"I don't know exactly—some division in the vestry."

"Is Thomas going with Magnus?"

"I don't know. He has come back to the office. I've been accommodating, knowing they're not well off. He is really not needed so much since Edmund has put his mind on his work."

"Dear Edmund! how is he?"

"He's well. He sent his love to you—says he'll be up to see you to-morrow evening—if you'll have him," he added cautiously.

"Of course! I've frightened you, haven't I, William," she said in softer accents. "But I'm raw, and every trifle hurts."

He did not answer. He was looking at her searchingly.

"Do you get enough to eat?" he inquired.

"Quite enough. Of course there is a good deal of grease and heavy pastry—you know what country cooking is as a rule—bad as possible. The coffee I make myself. I have always plenty of cream."

"You don't look nourished."

"Man cannot live by bread alone."

William moved uneasily in his chair. There was another subject about which he wished to speak before leaving, but it was difficult of approach. He concluded at last to begin in the middle of it.

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"I don't wish to seem impertinent, Eleanor, but may I ask a question? Doesn't Bradmore want to marry you?"

She restrained a rising wave of nervous anger.

"Yes, he does."

"I thought so!" William said triumphantly. "Well, you haven't told him 'No' have you?"

She evaded the question. "Do you want me to marry him?"

"Why, of course. It seems to me you have the solution of all these troubles right in the palm of your hand. He's rich; he's of good family; he knows all about you."

"Does he?" she asked coolly.

"What do you mean?" he said with apprehension. "Is there anything else to know?"

"Don't be alarmed, William. He does know more about me than you do, but it is of the inner life, not the outer. I shall not marry him, however."

"And why not, pray!" he said with sudden sharp insistence. "Is it because I want you to?"

"No. I have only one reason. I don't love him."

"You are past forty," he said reprovingly. "It isn't—it isn't quite decent for a woman to be in love after forty."

"But marriage without love is quite decent?"

William groaned. "I think you're foolish. He'd put you beyond all talk. You'd be an honorable married woman."

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"Marriage is more to me than a bucket of white-wash. I have no wish to lose my identity under his name. I have had too many years of another kind of deception; the truth is out at last, and in spite of everything, that fact's a comfort. I've nothing to conceal. I won't take a burden of falsehood again on myself."

"But how?" he asked with a puzzled look.

"It would be false to marry him without loving him—to marry for a screen."

"But you have more people than yourself to think of," he urged. "There is your daughter."

A sharp pain crossed her face. "That consideration weighs more than any other, but even—for Constance I cannot do this. I have thought of it many days—this is no sudden decision."

"You have thought of it, then!" he said hopefully.

"Of course."

"And you will not marry him?"

"If I marry him not loving him, I make myself what these people think I am."

"Well, I don't understand your logic. To me it's the other way 'round." He rose and reached for his hat. "What shall I tell Isabel?" he added.

She looked at him inquiringly. "About the visit, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I will write and thank her."

"No; you'd better send the message by me."

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She smiled. "Are you afraid I'll write something harsh? It wouldn't amuse me."

"Well as you like. But remember—" he paused on the threshold—"remember that we did ask you."

"I'll remember at least, the gesture."

CHAPTER XXXI

WILLIAM returned home, puzzled and ill at ease. The woman whom he had left on those hilltops seemed less and less a disturbing figure in the house of kinship, and more and more a book to be read. Across his decision regarding her fell a questioning doubt. His mode of life, his wholesale judgments—all were unfavorable to the indulgence of such curiosity, yet he could not wholly put it from him. These first stirrings of the critical spirit surprised him at strange hours—amid the clattering noises of the factory, or in the night watches. He would find himself on these occasions by Eleanor's side, walking with her in lonely places, feeling the burden of her incommunicable solitude.

“How did you find her?”

Isabel's question, spoken querulously across the table when the servants had withdrawn, seemed for the moment incapable of being answered in less than a whole treatise—the record of his own sensations rather than of his sister's. Edmund's mute, anxious gaze was even more disconcerting.

“I don't think the food agrees with her,” he answered irrelevantly.

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"She oughtn't to stay there. Is she—will she accept my invitation?"

"I don't think so."

Edmund turned to his mother.

"Did you imagine for one moment that she would?"

Isabel flushed. "I don't know why you say that, Edmund."

He was silent, evidently held between his desire to elucidate the matter, and his filial obligations. He decided in favor of the latter. During the past weeks a new feeling had arisen in his breast—the desire to shield his mother, just because she could not see so far as he did.

"I suppose Eleanor will never forgive me," Isabel quavered. "But if she hates us all, why does she stay near Broadhurst?"

"I, for one, am glad she's here," Edmund said. "I can go to see her when the sacrosanct get on my nerves."

"What does that word mean?" William asked suspiciously.

"You ought to know, father. You paid ten thousand dollars so that your son could have a graceful familiarity with such words."

"Oh, you learned it at Harvard, I suppose."

"I couldn't help learning something," Edmund said apologetically. "I did my best not to, but——"

His father was in no mood for humor. "I don't

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like words I'm not familiar with. I don't like other people to use them."

"But how would you ever know I'd been to college?"

William grunted. "It isn't visible to the naked eye."

Edmund laughed. "Poor pater—such a footless business! Mother, what makes you look unhappy? I'm only joking."

Tears came to Isabel's eyes. "I don't see how you can joke when we're all in such trouble."

"Joking is one way out of it. It seems to me we've all lacked a saving sense of humor in this matter."

"I don't see anything humorous in disgrace," Isabel said mournfully.

"I don't admit the disgrace. You've all admitted it, so you have to bear it."

His logic did not appeal to his parents. They both relapsed into silence. Edmund lit a cigarette, after asking his mother's permission. She took him up fretfully.

"You didn't use to ask my permission to smoke."

"My dear mother, there is no sanction for the immortality of bad manners."

"Well," William said, rising, "I am going to step over to the rectory. I want to know what Thomas's plans are."

"Tell Uncle Tom that if he does decide to stay here, he and I can set up a bachelor establishment."

"And leave your home!" Isabel cried out.

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"You would love me as a neighbor. My virtues, mother, dear, would expand; my faults melt imperceptibly away. Then I could come and call upon you in the evening, and you could attribute all the charms to me of somebody else's boy."

Isabel did not look comforted.

William found both his brother and nephew at home. Magnus was looking more than ever spiritualized. Yet there were signs that he had passed into a somewhat irritable sainthood. The breaking of his engagement with Constance had been, he told himself, the greatest sacrifice which he had ever offered up to the church. Now that she was gone from his life, he scarcely remembered the oblique road by which she had entered the world. The pearly light about her lingered delicately. He mourned for her as for the passing of a legend—the record of a hope that he was fain to hold forever in his breast in its ancient, untouched whiteness.

Thomas walked warily along the edge of these mystic humors was in a mood on this evening to welcome even William's obviousness. His brother's presence seemed for once to bring with it a sense of comfort, of a hold on tangible things.

"I just stepped over," William said, "to know if you're going with Magnus, or if you're going to stop here. If you're leaving, of course I'll have to look around for somebody else. Edmund has buckled down at last, but he can't do it all. The business has increased so in the last two years."

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"Of course, my father goes with me," Magnus said with a finality of emphasis. Thomas shifted in his chair uneasily.

"Well, I don't know," he answered. "I think I had better stay here until you're settled."

"Stay in Broadhurst!"

"Yes."

The decision in his voice seemed to indicate a fear that he might be forced to accept his stepson's verdict.

"I don't want to interfere in your plans, of course," William put in.

"I'll stay on here a while," Thomas said, not looking at Magnus. "I might not be able to get anything to do in town."

"It isn't necessary that you should, father. Under the terms of my acceptance of St. Helen's there will be ample for both."

"I'd miss my work. I haven't always liked it, but I'd miss it."

William nodded comprehendingly. It was beginning to dawn on him that the relative positions in which he and his brother stood could not always be pleasant to the dependent one. He wondered why Thomas chose to stay. Was it to be nearer Eleanor? Or was it really that he had a kind of attachment for his chain and ball? By this light his brother was dislimned of his old features, but, as in the case of Eleanor, it was still beyond William's power to sup-

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ply the new physiognomy. He was vaguely touched, however, by Thomas's decision to remain. He had the impulse to say on the spot, "The business is prospering, I'll raise your salary a thousand dollars," but his habitual caution in money matters checked him. He would sleep on it.

When he was gone Magnus turned a reproachful face to his stepfather.

"What do you mean by remaining in Broadhurst? I thought it was all settled. Why, you've hated this place for years. You've fretted to get away."

"I know I have."

"Then why do you want to stay?"

"I do not want to leave my sister."

"Is that the only reason?"

"Isn't it sufficient? But, there's another. I do not want to go to St. Helen's. I confess, Magnus, that I want to live nearer the earth. I can't share your enthusiasms. Since the breaking of your engagement they have come to seem more or less inexplicable to me. And it seems to me besides, that St. Helen's is the price of a good deal of suffering. Were you not afraid that you might lose the rectorship if you married a girl with a stain upon her birth?"

An expression of pain crossed Magnus's face.

"You do not remember, father, that I believed that I was losing St. Helen's by breaking the engagement. They did not want a priest without means. I have suffered deeply in giving up Constance."

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The note of sincerity in his voice was carried out by his appearance. He looked broken upon the wheel of his elected sainthood.

"You always forget," he added, "that I am not a free agent."

"The logic of your position is clear to me," Thomas said, "but it should have excluded the thought of marriage from the beginning."

"Not the thought of marriage, but the thought of love. I might have known that I could not serve two masters."

Thomas regarded him curiously. "You mean you would be willing to marry without love?" he asked in surprise.

"I should rather have friendship; I need the calmer bond. I am not equal to the other. It absorbs me, dominates me, draws me from my true service."

He spoke with a conviction that carried weight.

Thomas wondered if there were, indeed, natures too high-pitched to admit of a divided devotion. Magnus might have given Constance up in any case, realizing that when with her he but loitered on his difficult way.

"It was perhaps as well," he said tentatively, "that your engagement was broken. Constance could never have shared your conception of the church, and of your duties to it."

"If you will pardon me for saying so, that was her mother's influence. Mrs.—Mrs. Valgrave has that universal sympathy with all creeds which is the most deadly form of indifference. Her pantheon has room



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for Buddha and Isis. I hate this modern complacency which makes comprehension of all religions an excuse for following none."

Yet he knew that his own ardor of faith during these past weeks had not brought him the comfort which was equivalent to the triumph of the truths he stood for. He had handled the vessels of the altar with numb fingers. He had longed for human companionship and understanding.

A sense of being deserted filled him for days after this conversation with his stepfather. They had always depended upon each other to banish the specter of loneliness which meets sometimes the most absorbed man, when, leaving the day's activities behind him, he crosses the threshold of a home which no woman shares. He had for years been accustomed to think of Thomas Hatherley as an admirer and learner. That the paternal mind had its independent workings was as disconcerting a discovery as would have been the adopting by the wife of one's bosom of the Arian heresy.

He had a keen understanding of his own temperament when he had said that friendship was for him a better basis of marriage than love. Constituted as he was only the exercise of his mission could bring him peace—even then hard-won and intermittent. But on quiet, unobtrusive companionship he depended much.

He felt that he could not go to St. Helen's alone. He must go there with some one who believed in him

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and in his work, who would be in his life as an accompaniment, not dominating it, nor diverting it from its true course.

His thoughts at this crisis turned often to Gertrude Wayne, who seemed to be understanding and sharing, though at a far distance, his conflict. He was never obliged when with her, to excuse his preoccupation or his depression. That she herself was both preoccupied and sad was a fact hidden from him. He realized only her strength and quietness, and that through all the disturbing events of the past year she had stayed precisely in the position where it was now of most gain to him to find her.

CHAPTER XXXII

ELEANOR'S days passed in that kind of monotony which either kills or heals. Long solitary walks over the winter hills were followed by long hours of mechanical, unilluminated work in the studio where the cold north light seemed searching out the blankness of her own spirit. She had little or no companionship. Divining Mrs. Sutro's attitude of maternal jealousy, she discouraged James Sutro's first shy attempts to relieve her loneliness by offering her books from his well-chosen little library and placing his horses at her disposal. She refused all favors, keeping narrowly within the bounds of the business proposition.

But Eleanor was not of the temperament to endure long the bargaining attitude toward existence. Her isolation was beginning to have all the torment which lies in negativity. The silence of those snow-covered hills seemed through the long night watches to be advancing nearer and nearer to crush her slowly, like the moving dungeon walls of which she had once read. She dreaded the nights when the wind did not blow. Its rushing and roaring, its magnificent caprices awoke in her a sense of companionship. The stillness appalled her. She faced then paradoxical torments. She knew she could no more repent of her years with



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Godfrey than of the natural growth which turns a child into a woman. Alone with him she had felt no guilt. They two were the universe and made the laws thereof. But when she had crossed the threshold of their home, it was to meet the accusation of sin. The verdict of the world clashed with the verdict of her heart, and when her child came, her child—unfathomable mystery!—became the world. From the hour when Constance was laid upon her breast she had felt, with the chill of coming anguish, that her daughter belonged as much to the social order which Eleanor had defied, as to her.

She reflected that it was still society which found her guilty, not God nor nature—nature so frankly indifferent to the ethical code as long as its own procreative energies found vent; God so immeasurably removed from both good and evil in the awful hush of the Absolute. If society could show a god-warrant for its dictums, she said to herself that she would gladly own her wrongdoing, but its array of proofs seemed no nearer divinity than accidents of climate or custom, of an evolved and ever-evolving civilization which sometimes, like Chronos, ate its own children. She longed in her despairing moods for a sense of sin on which to build up some new fabric of existence, but she could neither argue nor whip herself into it. She knew that the consciousness of guilt was, with her, only relative. She became a sinner only when her life touched her daughter's or the world's. She knew that her suffering sprang from the loss of Constance.

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Yet Constance had thought her, still thought her, guilty and did not forgive her. Eleanor shrank in misery from the memory of those last dreadful days together, when the girl's silence had been broken only by the necessary speech of household intercourse. She had left her mother in the same silence, her farewell kiss as cold as from the lips of the dead.

This was the unbearable point in her memories. When she came to it, as she inevitably did, she would rise and go fiercely to work, or else she would seek the outside world. The comfort of nature was in its untiring and unheeding life, dwarfing the passions of men by its unconsciousness of them.

In one of these flights toward a refuge she met Gertrude Wayne coming slowly along the road which led to the farm house. The girl seemed absorbed in thoughts of no pleasurable kind. She held out both hands to Eleanor with the unaffected cordiality which she always showed.

"I am glad not to miss you. Are you going for a walk?"

"I was running away; I don't know where," Eleanor answered.

"Let us run away together then. I want to talk with you, if you will listen, of a matter of great importance to me."

"I shall be only too glad to listen. There has been no voice from the outer world for days. Where shall we go?"

Gertrude pondered a moment. "I know a little

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copse which is nearly always clear of snow. There is a big log there for a seat and some stones on which we can build a fire. I have apples and matches and a flask of sherry and some biscuit in my great-coat pockets. You see I came equipped."

"I'd like it," Eleanor said. "I don't want to go indoors, or I'd ask you in."

"And I want the open air as much as you do. It is easier to talk out of doors."

Eleanor wondered, but asked no questions. She had a dim premonition that the conversation would be of Magnus. Was Gertrude still in love with him?

They swung along briskly, their cheeks reddened with the wind, their eyes brightened.

After a while they struck into the fields, walking now on the frozen surface of the snow. A brilliant sky arched above them, making the shadows of a deep cerulean blue. The ermine pomps of winter swathed majestically the stretches of the hills.

"How difficult it is to imagine the awakening," Eleanor said. "Yet in four or five weeks we shall see it."

"In four or five weeks there'll be many changes," Gertrude said with a sigh. "I sometimes think the only permanent thing in life is change."

They reached the copse at last, a hushed, dim place, fragrant with the smell of pine-needles. Near the improvised fireplace picnickers of a bygone summer had left a little store of wood. Gertrude proceeded deftly to make a fire. She had her mother's faculty

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of producing physical comfort, and even in this chilly shelter, she seemed by some magic to exclude the dominant winter world and to draw even the surrounding trees into a circle of cosiness. The flames shot up gaily with promise of witchery and warmth. The apples were put to roast, and the other refreshments were set forth. Then the girl seated herself on the log by Eleanor and began abruptly:

"I have come to ask your permission to marry."

"To marry Magnus Brent?"

"Yes."

"He has then—a new love?"

"If he had I should not be here. He does not love me in the least."

Eleanor looked curiously at her visitor. Gertrude had the air of a woman who has parted with her first illusions, yet who feels the stronger for her loss. She had not evaded her problem, but faced it even to the last link of its logic.

"Do you divine this, if I may ask—or has he told you?"

"He told me frankly. He has been fair—you know his love of the truth. He speaks of affection, of respect, of his belief in my power to aid him in his new work, but not of love. He distinctly wishes me to understand that it is not love. He came to me after he knew that his stepfather would not go with him to St. Helen's. I think he could not face the loneliness, for with all his apparent strength he is a dependent person—and he knew that he would be

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safe with me. We are perfectly congenial—within certain limits.”

The two women were silent for a time. They were both conscious that their ability to enter upon a conversation of such intimacy indicated a deep mutual understanding of the character of the person under discussion. He was only, indeed, an incident in some greater congeries of fortunes.

“And why do you seek my permission, Gertrude?”

“It is not so much your permission as your understanding. Can you understand what it is to love so much that you have no pride left; no sense of personal dignity?—to love, knowing that for the most part he is unworthy? I used to believe that Magnus Brent was the incarnation of everything noble. I have learned that his priestly work is only the expression of a refined egotism. Yet I love him, and I would continue to love him through an eternity of disenchantments.”

“That is the only way,” Eleanor said.

Her thoughts had gone back across the years to a man whose character was veined by no traceable nobility—except, perhaps, the persistence of his love for her; a love deflected on occasions by the sheen of another woman’s hair, or the light in another’s eyes; yet returning always to her as the inevitable, the final woman. Godfrey could no more live without superficial changes of sensation, than without his morning coffee; yet, knowing this physical facility, this egotism which required for its satisfaction a thousand-and-one

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tales of romance, she had loved him, and would love him forever.

"You understand then?" Gertrude asked timidly.

"I understand."

"You do not blame me, Mrs. Valgrave?"

"How could I!"

"He had me in his power from the first. He knew I loved him."

Eleanor smiled, gazing into the fire whose leaping flames seemed no more to be seized and classified than the emotions of which they spoke.

"They ought never to know it, but a good woman cannot hide her feelings as a rule. It's a part of her sincerity. Well, you may be happy. I hope so. Magnus's association with you may broaden him."

They were again silent. Above them the March wind swayed the branches, its voice, even in this wintry scene, shrill with the young cry of spring hastening to passionate trysts in field and garden. Eleanor thought of herself, of Gertrude, of Magnus, of Bradmore, each seeking happiness in an impaired ideal or resigning it altogether as having no place in a world of insufficiencies. She wondered why human nature should be perpetually dissatisfied. What must be the splendor of that goal whose intermittent gleams lured men even from the warm and steady glow of their hearth fires! What did they desire whom even fame and achieved ambition left restless? Whom did they desire whose natures were small enough to be pleased with toys, yet vast enough to find no permanent happi-

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ness in earthly gains and pleasures? Whom did they desire!

After a time Gertrude spoke:

"I have said things to you this afternoon that I would not say to my own mother—but you have lived."

"I'm glad you came to me. Will you marry soon?"

"Not for a year or more—and there's to be no engagement announcement. You are the only one who knows."

"I will keep your secret."

"And you do not blame me?"

"I am not in the world of critics. I forfeited my right to be there years ago. I doubt if I would take it back if I could."

CHAPTER XXXIII

NOW tell me another story before Uncle Philip comes—not out of Grimm, but out of your very own mind.”

Wilhelmina seated herself in front of Constance, Turk fashion, her bare legs tucked under her stiff linen skirt, her brown, slender hands folded in her lap. They were spending the afternoon on a little island of the river which ran through the grounds of the Mangen estate; a spot thick with violets and clothed in the first transparent green of spring. Sunshine of yellowest gold was flooding the place, dispelling the slight chill of the breeze from the shallow, noisy stream.

“What if I should refuse you, Wilhelmina, and say that I wished instead to think my own thoughts?”

“Your thoughts belong to me, dear,” the child answered. “You remember the day I wouldn’t let Beatrice Howland play with my doll. You said all good things should be passed along to others. I see now the force of your argument.”

“Where did you get that phrase?”

“I’ve heard Uncle Philip say it.”

“And you copy him in everything? It would be better to use your own words.”

“But I like his better.”

“Why?”

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"Because I love him."

"Do you love him because he loves you?" Constance delighted in putting questions to the child.

"I am not certain that he does."

"But you know he does, dear," she said, her voice unconsciously softening.

"I'd rather not be too certain. I played for a whole week that he hated me, so that I could try very hard to make him like me."

"Did he—at the end of the week?"

"I don't know. He said, 'Wilhelmina, you deserve a spanking,' but he kissed me."

John raised himself from a nearby hammock. "Send her to me, Miss Valgrave. You can't enjoy the afternoon if Wilhelmina is in a speculative mood."

Wilhelmina, ignoring this imputation, addressed herself to Constance.

"Do you wish me to go?"

"I don't like to put it just that way," Constance said politely, "but really we might enjoy each other more if you——"

"I see." She scrambled to her stout little legs and went over to her brother. "I am not here because you wished it, but because Miss Valgrave is tired of me—and I don't blame her," she added frankly.

Constance, after some futile attempts to read, wandered away from them to another part of the long, narrow island, which commanded a view of the gardens now gay with harlequin tulips, bridal wreath, the flaming blossoms of the Japanese quince, and the

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variegated hues of pansies. The lawns spread out their young vivid green, dappled with ethereal light and shade. The old house, with its window boxes—splashes of color against the dull warm brick—and wide open doors seemed to share the expansive vitality of the scene. Constance, despite her heaviness of spirit, had grown to love this place, and to depend upon its influences as upon a narcotic. The even flow of the hours, the recurrence of simple duties and simpler pleasures, the withdrawal of the entire household from the outside world, had soothed her heart and calmed her brain; had restored to a degree her physical balance. Yet she knew that her content was superficial. She had not dealt with her problems. She had only thrust them for a time out of sight in an oubliette to which other hands held the key. She felt this whenever she sat down to write to her mother, or when she received her strained letters.

She was glad to turn from the haunting consciousness of that dark cell to the cheerfulness of Philip's presence, or to the quaint fancies of the children cloaked in the raiment of maturity because of their constant association with older people, yet beneath so unconquerably childlike. Philip's gay weighing of the problems of existence was an especial delight to her. His high-strung temperament was a medium of joy and enthusiasm rather than of the uneasiness which often accompanies a too-keen sensibility. He was introspective without being self-absorbed; analytical without relying implicitly on his intellectual judgments.

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He seemed always to leave a margin for the gracious verdict of the heart.

Since the day when he had come to her in the school-room they had been much together. Constance at first had drawn back from this companionship, but her need of it was greater than the authority of her theories. Philip and she had too many tastes in common to remain strangers. After a while she obeyed the sunnier call, but as yet it spoke to her only as a part of the comforting life of the household.

He was to join her this afternoon to take a picnic supper with her and the children, a fête which Mrs. Mangan did not attend because of certain associations which such occasions had for her. Constance's eyes wandered from her book in the hope of seeing his tall figure emerge from the trees on the other side of the lawn that sloped down to the banks of the river. She knew that when he did appear he would seem, as always, an organic part of the picture. His abundant vitality linked him to the outdoor world.

She became interested in her reading and, at last, so absorbed, that she did not hear his footsteps until he was close beside her. He paused a moment, thinking that but for her book she looked the naiad or nymph of the place, an incarnation of all the dainty allurements of the vernal time. Philip was no more original than other embryonic lovers in the mating season. The old, worn similes shone out brightly in his happy fancy.

"This is the first time I've ever been ignored by a hostess."

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Her book dropped from her lap. She rose to greet him, a soft, welcoming light in her eyes that made his heartbeats rapid. He was scarcely aware yet how much he desired her graciousness, for he had been too happy of late for self-analysis.

"I was waiting to hear the children shout their welcome. How did you manage to reach the island without their seeing you?"

"I stole a march on them. I came from the other side of the stream. Isn't it a wonder of a day! It's no time for books. I'm ashamed of you."

"Let us go down to the children then," she said shyly. "They have been so impatient for you."

"Give me a few moments breathing-space," he begged. "You know what I'll be in for."

She acknowledged that tyranny awaited him.

"You make yourself far too attractive to them," she added.

"I think you share my honors, Miss Valgrave. I've changed my mind about the book. Please read to me awhile. I've brought the 'Golden Treasury.'"

He took from his pocket the little blue volume worthy to be called, because of its frequent presence in youthful romance, the lover's complete companion, and handed it to her. His tone of easy authority seemed just then one with the influences of the day—with the clear air and the sunshine that was like a screen hiding both the grayness of duty and the feverish hues of struggle. Constance was content to obey.

Philip did not listen when she began, but watched

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her intently, searching her face for some solution of the mystery she was to him. In itself her countenance was frankly girlish, disassociated from even the possibility of care, its flower-like delicacy suggestive only of those pleasures which should belong to maidenhood; or those ambiguous, half-imagined sorrows which youth creates out of its inexperience for very luxury of melancholy. Her unlikeness to other girls was in her lack of spontaneity. He felt when he had made her smile or laugh that he had achieved a victory over some dark obsession of her spirit. He wished to make the victory permanent, to evoke her youth which had no right to lie fallow. Sometimes he was impatient of her withdrawals. Had he too not known grief? And did he not look beyond it to life and joy. He had reached the point, however, where he could not be joyful alone.

"Your voice sounds tired," he interrupted gently. "Are you tired?"

"Not to-day," she answered.

"But yesterday and to-morrow."

"Perhaps."

He bent toward her, his eyes asking for confidences, their look protecting.

"You are not altogether happy—not quite as happy as this long spring day."

His voice enfolded her with the warmth of his awakening passion. She did not answer at once but sat very still, hearing as from a far distance the lap-lap of the water and the murmur of the wind stirring

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lightly the young leaves. An undertone of sweet but forbidden import seemed to mingle with the natural sounds. She scarcely trusted herself to answer him, lest the emotion awakened by his sympathy should bear her too far from the contentment of the moment.

"How do you know that I am not happy?" she asked, a slight tremor in her voice.

"How do I know the color of your eyes?"

"Am I so readable?" she said, with a note of dismay.

"Can sunlight be hidden? Joy and grief are like that. I have sometimes wondered if our house oppresses you."

"I could not have breathed in one less silent," she answered.

"It fits your mood?"

"I am not a creature of moods. I have only known facts."

"Harsh facts?"

"Yes."

"They seem to hang on you like chains," he said, "and, forgive me—I hear them clank at times."

"I am sorry that I have shown so much. I have been self-absorbed."

"I am sorry that you are not happy. We want you to be happy—my mother and I."

"It is good of you. I am less sad here than I should be anywhere else. Your home has been a haven to me."

"Be happy," he said softly; "there are few acci-

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dents of life worth grieving long over. Even the grief for a friend who has died ought to have hope and calm in it, and perhaps joy, when you think what he has left. I say that to myself," he went on. "But after all, on days like these, I want him back. I want him to smell the blossoms and to feel the sunshine. I think he is cheated somehow. Yet they may have given him rarer pleasures."

It was the first time he had spoken of the loss of his brother in its personal bearing. She wanted to ask him if there were things worse than death, but she feared his answer. She had already divined from his whole attitude toward life that dishonor would have for him a mortal significance. Pride of birth in him meant chiefly pride in an honorable name, in a family whose aristocratic righteousness was a premeditated thing; the outcome of tradition and obligation.

"Do they ever speak of their father to you—the children?" he asked. "They never do to me."

"John does. Wilhelmina has never spoken of him."

"After his death her nurse would find her sleeping night after night with wet lashes and cheeks; but in the daytime she went about indifferently. Her grandmother attempted to tell her once what Paradise must be to her father, but Wilhelmina declined to hear. She said, 'I know he misses me, and I cannot bear to think of it.' After that we said nothing more to her."

"I understand how she feels."

"You, too, have lost someone?"

"Yes; but not by death."

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He wondered if she had had a disappointment in an early romance; and he was vaguely jealous of the Aucassin who might return some day, riding gaily through the fair spring weather. Yet she did not seem like a girl who had known love. Everything about her was unopened and blossom-like.

She rose as she spoke, and he knew that she wished to end the conversation. They walked back in silence to the children. Wilhelmina came running to meet them.

"I saw you, Uncle Phil, when you landed on the island half an hour ago."

"Indeed! And why didn't you announce my coming?"

Wilhelmina looked up with a little quirk of a smile. "I knew you wanted to be with my dear Constance, so I said nothing to John."

Philip grew red. There was a moment's awkward silence, and then he and Constance laughed—the happy laughter that melts formality, welds friendship and sometimes creates love. The discomforts and the pains of life are not always the chief operators in forging character and directing the course of events. The levers of mirth and of sunny trifles have no small power. In their laughter over a child's frankness Constance and Philip crossed a border sharply dividing an old life from a new. The man at least from that moment was conscious that he loved.

Constance herself forgot the past and the future, those temporal enemies of joy. The four, all children

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together, played on the spring-decked island, and John's conceit that they should call themselves "The Companions of Columbus" seemed just then, to one of the group, a fortunate omen. What purple Indies might not lie beyond the rim of the world! What boundless regions might not be found in the heart of a girl!

CHAPTER XXXIV

NEXT morning Constance came out of a troubled sleep into a state of vague self-reproach, the reasons for which grew clearer as the hours on the island were recalled. She was conscious that she had left some gate unguarded over which she had stood for weeks a jealous porter. She lay motionless in her bed hearing through the importunate chorus of the birds' welcome to the day sounds sweeter and stranger. Her whole being relaxed by sleep opened rosy portals to the messenger who came with the dawn. She knew that in another hour the message might turn into a decree of exile, but the hour at least was hers.

Philip's voice sounded in her ears. She saw again his eager eyes, and read in them something too wonderful to be believed. Yet she desired the entrancing sweetness of belief.

After a while she slipped from her bed and went to her mirror, trying to justify her dalliance with these happy memories. Her image reflected there spoke only of glowing youth, and of youth's right to joy. He had found her acceptable. She knew that her beauty pleased him, and she was glad. But her pride was of short duration. An ugly fancy obtruded

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itself. She had heard that natural children were often of a finer mold, of a more gracious physical bearing than their fellows. Her very charms must witness to the stain of her origin.

The spell was broken; the rainbow colors were dissolved by these reflections. She put the memories of the day before sternly from her, telling herself that her imagination had been too active. She reproached herself for slipping so easily from her appointed path, lured like a child by sunshine and a few flowers. In future she would keep Philip at a far distance.

He, himself, had other plans. He had spent the night-watches, not in reminiscence, but in a practical forecasting of his courtship. He knew that he loved Constance Valgrave, and rejoiced in his knowledge. He knew, too, that he should not win her easily. The task of breaking through her real or imaginary sorrow and encasing her in his own joyous faith would call for wide-open eyes and skillful generalship.

He knew that she would have a reaction from her yielding, sympathetic mood of the night before; and though it would cost him full measure of self-control, he resolved to keep for a day or two closely to his studies, watching the effect of his withdrawal meanwhile upon her spirits. He would stay away until she missed him, and desired him.

Lovers' strategies are clumsy in proportion to the strength and truth of their feeling. Philip, a mendicant, played the rôle of aloof monarch badly. His

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own sensations screened Constance from his observation. What he did see was that she was very quiet, and disinclined to meet his eyes or to answer at any length his casual remarks. The need of being with her conquered at length his diplomacy, and on the afternoon of the third day he went intrepidly to the schoolroom, and begged the favor of her company on a walk. She declined the invitation.

"And why," he questioned, his serious young eyes measuring the distance between them by more than the stretch of the schoolroom floor.

"Must I give you reasons?" she objected, but a smile hovered for a moment about her lips.

"Certainly," he replied with dignity.

"I am busy."

He shook his head.

"I do not accept that. The afternoon is glorious, and you need the sunlight," he added significantly.

She looked at him in silence. Her struggle with herself had tired her out. Must she give up even their friendly companionship and might she not be mistaken in the nature of his feeling? He had said nothing—yet she knew!

"I will go out for a little while," she said at last, scarcely knowing whether she wished to test herself or him, yielding to the claim of the moment which he always filled to the shutting-out of future penalties. His presence dissolved her will. Both knew to-day that they were on a different plane. To one, the knowledge was a solution of many problems, a victory over

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minor emotions, to the other, a new gospel ending, as all gospels, in renunciation. But if he did not speak she was reprieved. She could still enjoy his companionship.

As they crossed the lower hall, Mrs. Mangan came out of the drawing-room. She gave a quick glance from one to the other, but her face did not betray the thought that flashed through her mind. She had much confidence in Constance's poise and good-breeding, but she had her own theories concerning the effects of propinquity on youthful hearts. Her plans for Philip did not include his marriage until he was past thirty.

"You are going for a walk?" she said, a touch of aloofness in her manner.

"I insisted on Miss Valgrave going out," Philip said, taking the full responsibility with squared shoulders. "Won't you — won't you come with us, mother?"

"Thank you, no," Mrs. Mangan answered. "I could not keep pace with you."

They were silent as they went through the gardens, between the flowering bushes and the bright beds of tulips. Love, above all passions, restores to the phenomena of nature and of life their high ancient significance, undimmed by familiarity or belittled by skepticism. Children, poets, and lovers find the world wonderful and glistening with heavenly dews. Into

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this fresh creation Constance and Philip walked, their souls inhaling the ampler ether; their eyes seeing brilliant highways where before were barriers.

Philip had no intention of disturbing this communion with the spoken word. For the first time in his life he was content to progress slowly, making sure that every step of the way contributed to the gaining of the final goal. He would draw nearer to Constance day by day, winning her trust, and gradually, he prayed, her love.

The clearness of the afternoon before had given place to a slight haze of warm violet in the distance, suggestive of showers and heavy sunshine. Philip proposed that they should seek a nearby hilltop for a breath of fresher air, and thither they went slowly. At last they gained the height, from which a pastoral country unrolled itself on all sides, lush meadows, fields and woodlands. Even the straggling village was hidden by the trees. The square tower of the parish church alone indicated the neighborhood of human habitations.

"I often think," Philip said, "of how this country looked when Patrick Mangan, my ancestor, settled here. It must have been wild enough, but I imagine his previous life in Ireland as younger son in an impoverished family had not been too comfortable. He was probably prepared for hardships."

A shadow passed over Constance's face. She obeyed her instinct to drive the knife home.

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"You believe in race strongly, do you not—in the value of an unbroken, honored line."

"Almost more than in anything else," he replied with enthusiasm, not seeing that her face whitened. "Why, it stands to reason that a family that has kept its traditions and its ideals intact through several generations has accomplished a big share in the world's work. A family, to me, is a soul that can be helped forward or retarded by the individual members. Don't you think so?" he added. It was the phrase with which he usually concluded any straightforward statements. He never went far without pausing for her sympathy. If she withheld it, his power of onward adventure seemed taken away.

"Yes, I think so," she said in a low voice.

"People talk of being cosmopolitans, but it's my belief that you can't be one until you've first been a thorough-going provincial, loving your particular fireside, your own garden, keeping on the best of terms with your neighbors, learning to be a good citizen on a patch of land. When you've got the lesson by heart then go into the big world and neighbor with Russians and East Indians—you're safe!"

Constance scarcely heard what he said. A mortal coldness seemed creeping over her in the midst of that bland and quiet scene. If he knew her secret would he not turn from her?

She was not conscious of the exaggeration of her point of view. Eleanor in rearing her by white magic had overdone her task, preparing an immense chasm to

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be bridged should the truth ever become known to Constance. The girl impaled on a falsehood could struggle, but she could not as yet go forward.

He turned and saw the look in her face that he thought he had altogether banished.

"You are playing truant again, Miss Valgrave. You are leagues away. But I don't wonder," he added penitently. "Why don't you interrupt me when I get on a high horse. I theorize until I drive you into the next county or further. Please come back."

His voice was winning and she had little power to resist his plea. She sat erect with the air of one casting off a burden. He forgot his theories watching her with his new pride in her many graces. When they knew each other better he wanted to ask her many things—among others if her mother, whom he believed dead, as Constance had never mentioned her, had not been a very beautiful and extraordinary woman.

CHAPTER XXXV

MAGNUS was climbing the last long hill which led to the Sutro farm house. He was upon the eve of his departure for the city, and in his farewell calls he was including Eleanor, an act in anticipation of which he had summoned much courage. The impossibility of ever making her understand his reasons for breaking his engagement was almost equivalent to his being guilty.

As he strode along his meditations were of a nature to render him indifferent to the beauty of the spring day. Constance, by the paradox of all rejections, had never seemed so precious to him as now, yet the sharpest of his pain at last behind him he had no wish to recall her. The thought of Gertrude brought him comfort. He would have a woman at his side who idealized him and knew the value of his work; a woman who could make a comfortable home for him and whose fortune would be at his service for the aiding of his ministry. He had waived many points in accepting her devotion, among them her lack of aristocratic antecedents, and he felt at times the glow of the benefactor.

He found Eleanor in the garden of the farm house. He had not seen her for several weeks, and the change

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in her appearance startled him. She looked thin and aged; sunk in an apathy, and making no attempt to conceal it. She rose and came forward to meet him with more cordiality in her manner than he had dared to expect.

"I suppose you have come to say good-bye to me. This is your week for departure, is it not?"

"Yes; I leave on Friday."

She, in her turn, was regarding him closely. He looked dissatisfied; not at all as upon the threshold of an achieved ambition. For the moment she forgot his personal delinquencies in the thought that, after all, he was sincere in his extraordinary theory of existence which had removed him, lamentably, from the considerations which govern most men. Across her distaste for his type of personality flashed one of those insights which show the whole human race, saint and sinner, the feeble and the strong, the blunderers and the wise men, inextricably bound together by their common longing for some sort of happiness. She had pursued hers and failed; he was pursuing his and not attaining it. Such insights are fatal to wholesale judgments. Eleanor submitted to the compromise which, in analytical natures, is the marsh where their strong prejudices are lost.

"Does your father go with you?"

"No; my father, to my deep regret, stays here."

Eleanor smiled faintly.

"We seem as a family to be disintegrating."

"Or forming new combinations. Edmund wishes

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to set up a bachelor establishment, and have my father with him."

"That seems to me a good arrangement."

"Well enough, if he must remain here. But I cannot understand his remaining."

"The force of old associations is very strong. It brought me home," she added.

He was silent. When he spoke it was of another matter. They talked casually for a while, and then Magnus rose to go. As he held out his hand, he said:

"I hope I am leaving Broadhurst with at least no ill-will toward me on your part. This whole matter has been a great grief to me."

She had an impulse to say, "Your grief has not interfered with your laying careful plans for the future," but she refrained. She said instead, "I wish you every success in your work. I at least understand how important that is to you."

This did not satisfy him, but he knew no argument cogent enough to convince her, so after a further exchange of commonplaces, they parted. She watched him as he strode down the garden path; watched him as he went down the road, a somber figure in the blaze of spring sunshine. He had been but a shadow in her life, a shadow of the tragic substance which was her own creation, and as a shadow he was finally lost to view.

She did not return to her book, the ordinary French tale of the only situation which, to the Gallic mind, is

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thoroughly dramatic; it seemed to her as stale as a last week's cream puff. It presented no more subtle solution of the difficulty than a duel of the marionettes called husband and lover, and Eleanor longed for some clarion truth which should proclaim why people both sinned and suffered; the truth at any price seemed these days to be the only thing worth having.

She was roused from her reverie by the approach of Mrs. Sutro, who had a letter in her hand. Since it had become plain to her that Mrs. Valgrave's one thought was of her daughter, the maternal vigilance had relaxed, had melted, indeed, into a kind of sympathy. Good or bad, this woman was a mother—and a bereft mother.

"I'm glad you're sitting out, Mrs. Valgrave," she said as she delivered the letter. "'Tain't likely this sunshine 'll last long—it's a 'weather-breeder.' Better have one of the hired men drive you out this afternoon—or James."

She said the words with an effort, but Eleanor knew they were equivalent to a declaration of trust. She thanked her warmly and detained her for a few moments, glad to postpone the reading of the letter. She was always hoping for some sign of life in Constance's letters, and always disappointed. Her daughter avoided the personal issue like a burnt child.

Eleanor read the brief pages, as destitute of a message for her as if they had been written in Sanskrit. Would they go on forever putting the dead limbs through ghastly motions of life?

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Her mood made action imperative. She thought she would take a walk through the fields. As she rose to go she heard the garden gate click. William was entering, his hat in one hand, the other holding a handkerchief with which he mopped his brow. She hurried to meet him.

"You didn't walk all the way!"

"The coachman drove me up," he answered puffing, "but I wouldn't let the mare take the last hill."

Eleanor wondered what could bring him to the farm in the middle of a work-day morning, but she asked no questions. William led the way to the bench she had left, and seated himself in the shade with a sigh of satisfaction.

"There isn't any hotter sunshine going than the kind you get in May."

"You probably have on your winter flannels yet," Eleanor suggested.

"That's so! I'm always afraid to take them off for fear it'll turn blizzard cold. I don't think much of the spring," he went on, as if that season were a coquette who had jilted him. "For real comfort, for good, soft sunshine, give me October. I feel like a fighting-cock in October."

She acquiesced in this laudation of her own favorite month, and waited for him to broach the real subject of his visit.

"Isabel's sick," he said at last.

Eleanor murmured, "I'm sorry."

"I don't think it's serious. She has a touch of

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fever—and with it the notion—” he paused and looked embarrassed—“the notion that she’d like one of the cool drinks you used to know how to concoct—things with ice in them and mint and lemon,” he added vaguely.

“I imagine she’s thinking of iced bouillon,” Eleanor said, but made no comment on Isabel’s wish. Her resentment of her sister-in-law, as prime creator of the miserable affairs of the past months was still active.

William waited helplessly, but she did not come to his rescue. She glanced at him sitting there hot and big and inadequate, and then she thought of him toiling up the hill to tell her that Isabel wanted an iced drink! What was behind it all? Or was it really the accident of a chance illness?

“She says,” William began again, “that she—she wishes you could come down.”

Eleanor was silent. The fount of pity was dry in her and she made no pretense of feeling it.

“She—she’s worried a lot over the mess she made. I believe that’s what’s made her sick.”

“Her worrying can’t undo the past,” Eleanor said coldly.

William looked miserable, and took refuge in platitude.

“We’ve all made mistakes. Wouldn’t you consent to come as a nurse, Nelly—just come and look after her as if she were a stranger, if you won’t come for any other reason?”

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"That would be a singular thing to do," she said. "If I went at all I'd go because she desires it, but that reason has not much force."

"I wish you'd change your mind and come," he said. "I, for one, would like to have you take charge down there while Isabel's sick."

"You know that I do not want to go down into Broadhurst," she answered. "You know how I am regarded."

"Damn Broadhurst! You're my sister," he said hotly.

"Yet you wanted me to leave there as quickly as possible some months ago."

She regretted the words the moment they were spoken, for she had always counted among the minor sins the feminine habit of bringing up past acts and words to serve as accusing reminders of frailty.

"I'll think it over and telephone you this afternoon," she said in a gentler voice.

He looked surprised and relieved, but he wisely made no comment. He said only, "If you should decide to come, I'll drive up for you."

"It wouldn't be necessary. James Sutro could take me down."

His leave-taking was brief, for he was afraid of a final refusal on the spot. When he was gone she went slowly toward the house, her head bent, conflict visible in her face. Her pride was still uppermost, and it made her see an element of the ridiculous in the situation. She said to herself that she could go to Isabel

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on the spur of a great emergency. But the pettiness of returning to her brother's roof to make his feverish wife a cooling drink, robbed forgiveness of its dignity. She was almost deciding to telephone at once not to expect her. One thing deterred her—the memory, in itself somewhat ridiculous, of William's hot, worried face, as he came through the garden gate mopping his forehead. He had seemed less like the domineering brother than ever before—more like someone to whom the mother in her could go out. She had always pitied men placed between two women who are not friendly, and having obligations to both.

As the day wore on the appeal of her brother's helplessness gained ground over her pride, but the latter died hard in the fires of a last burst of hatred for Broadhurst and all it represented of narrow convention and petty morality. She came out of it tired, dejected, and with none of the feeling of triumph which is popularly supposed to tread on the heels of an unselfish action.

Late that afternoon James Sutro drove her down to the town. The heat had departed, leaving only a pleasant geniality in the soft air. Delicate blossom odors floated from field and orchards. Eleanor felt her spirit becoming more calm. The man seated beside her saw the strained look fade from her face, and was glad.

"We shall miss you, Mrs. Valgrave," he said with the deference which was always in his voice when he spoke to her. "My mother said this afternoon that she would miss you."

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"That was good of her," she answered, and she spoke the conventional words feelingly.

"I want to tell you," he went on after some moments of silence, "that what you said to me long ago about making the farm my toy has helped me at last to get the better of the place. There have been times when I felt buried under its acres—crushed by the soil, so to speak. I'm on top now—and somehow it even looks different. It looks pretty and gay this spring, and I'm glad it's mine."

"Don't ever give up your plaything. The life with nature is one of the best in the world, and it need not make you narrow. You have other interests."

"I hope you're not leaving us for good, Mrs. Valgrave," he said wistfully.

"No; I shall come back."

They reached at last the main street of Broadhurst. Eleanor looked neither to the right nor the left, lest she should see old acquaintances. Since Constance had turned against her she had no social courage. Sutro, divining her feeling, touched the horses with the whip. They were soon in the grounds of William's place. He was waiting on the porch with Edmund, and they came down the steps together.

"Isabel's not worse?"

"About the same—it may be typhoid."

She went into the house with them, and Edmund took her into the library. William did not follow.

"I want to tell you how pleased father is, Aunt Eleanor. I didn't want them to send for you. I

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thought they had no right. But it was awfully decent of you to come. I am so glad to have you here. My virtue is toppling again," he added with a touch of his old humor.

"I didn't want to come. I can say that to you, you understand so well."

"I understand, indeed! Now will you go to my mother? She wants to see you, but she's half afraid."

"She's sick, and I'm well. I won't take any advantage."

She had dreaded a scene—some mawkish sentimentality of reconciliation, but Isabel, fortunately, was by this time ill enough to be indifferent to everything but the fact that a competent housekeeper was in the house to look after two forlorn men. She pressed Eleanor's hand gratefully and whispered that the keys of the pantries were in the right-hand corner of the middle bureau drawer. Eleanor suppressed a smile, for she knew that Isabel could show her no greater mark of confidence.

"They'll have lamb to-night," she whispered. "You'll find the mint jelly on the upper shelf to the right as you go in. You'll see to it yourself, won't you? I don't allow the maids——"

Her tired voice trailed away into helpless silence. Eleanor was touched. After all, these details of house-keeping had been affairs of state to Isabel—her one form of self-expression.

"I'll see to it all," she answered. "We'll follow your routine to the letter."

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Her sister-in-law smiled and closed her eyes with a sigh of comfort.

Eleanor entered at once upon her duties. After her months of lethargy and solitude, it was a relief to feel herself again part of a household, and with no time to brood. William and Edmund followed her about, as if they were afraid she would escape them. For the first time in months the closing in of evening had no horror for her. She felt a sense of shelter and protection that was very sweet. She was aware that the scene might shift again, and with the passing of the emergency might come the passing of the new relation to her family, but she did not let the thought oppress her. She would do what she could.

That evening when she had seen to everything that even the mind of a morbid housekeeper could contrive into a duty, and had launched the trained nurses upon their office, she went into the library where William sat alone smoking, and to judge from the expression of his face, pondering deeply on some subject. He rose and brought a chair forward, and she sank into it with a little sigh of relief. He saw that she was tired, and he brought a cushion for her; then went back to his cigar and to the silence which he thought she would appreciate. They had talked so much and to so little purpose!

She went into a reverie that lasted a long time. Finally she looked up.

"William, I want to tell you something—" She paused, and she saw for an instant an apprehensive

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expression in his face. She hastened to say, "It isn't disagreeable. I mean it only concerns myself. It's just that I wanted to say, that several weeks ago when we had that conversation about Constance, I did not tell you the truth. She has, in a sense, deserted me. She went away to teach, not because she wanted to hide herself from Broadhurst, but because she wanted to get away from me. The shock was too great for her. She writes to me, but her letters are dead things. That is why I cannot live near her."

He looked at her compassionately. "I am sorry, Nell. I wish—I wish she could understand."

"I wanted to tell you the whole truth—now there's nothing more."

CHAPTER XXXVI

MRS. MANGAN had sent for her son to come to her in her morning-room, and she was awaiting him in a mood of nervousness wholly foreign to her usual poise. She had watched him through more than one romantic crisis, and, to her relief, each had proved to be more a matter of the imagination than of the senses or the heart. His capacity for idealization was great, and in spite of his scientific bent of mind—or perhaps because of it—he had the poet's sensitiveness to women as beings linked to the finer and more spiritual issues of existence. His mother feared the time when he should love a woman just as she was, unhaloed, and no more exalted than nature itself.

When he came she spoke to him first of some matter connected with the stables. Then by degrees she reached household topics. She commented upon the children's improvement in French, arriving finally, and in accordance with his expectations, at Constance.

"I think I was most fortunate in my choice of a governess," she said. "She wears well. She's never in the way and never out of the way. Don't you agree with me, Philip?"

His smile was his first answer. "Did we ever disagree very far, mother?"

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"She has besides, what I think the finest qualities a young girl can have, modesty and discretion."

"Of course! Would you expect anything else, mother?"

"There is no occasion for championship. But—you like her very much, Philip."

"That is true," he answered without embarrassment. "I admire her more than any woman I've ever known."

Mrs. Mangan essayed diplomacy.

"It is natural; she is the young girl of whom you see the most. She is lovely in appearance and, I believe, in nature. Her sadness, her pre-occupation, whatever their cause, lend her charm just because she should be gay and glad like all young things."

"Yes, she should be gay and glad," he repeated with a tenderness which sent through her a thrill of jealousy, the mother's jealousy of all women as re-placers at the best, of old domestic affection, at the worst, possible marrers of a man's career.

He did not read her thoughts; but because he could not possibly believe in her withdrawal from this uppermost interest of his, he added:

"I should like to make her happy. She seems to me, mother, like a girl who has never loved, yet who has been disenchanted."

"Do you wish to re-enthrall this maiden?—to say, as Wilhelmina does, 'Let us play that the sunshine is real gold.'"

"There is only one way to re-enthrall her."

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He had no need to tell her now what he felt. He had the brave and proud and protecting expression of the lover to whom romance is becoming a practical code, capable of holding all its allurements under the noonday sun. She wished that he would show more desire to argue his cause instead of asserting it. Those who argue are still subject to the will of others. Matters that have gone beyond speech have gone far toward the infinite.

"All I ask of you is to do nothing hastily," she entreated.

"Why not! The sooner I can teach her to be happy, the better."

His mother pondered his words.

"She is a lady—that is obvious, but I should like to know more of her family before you committed yourself——"

"Mother, you speak as if I had only to ask her for her to accept me."

"My dear, no mother can imagine a woman refusing her son."

"It is just what she has done. I spoke yesterday. I meant to wait longer but I could not."

Mrs. Mangan gazed at Philip in dumb astonishment.

"How extraordinary!" she ejaculated. "She is either very clever or very——"

"Please do not say such things. She is not a coquette."

"May I ask you a question, Philip?"

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"A hundred, if you like. This concerns us both very deeply."

"Did she give you a reason for her refusal?"

"No. She seemed much distressed. She begged me not to speak of the subject again to her."

Mrs. Mangan looked puzzled. She had her full share of maternal pride. Ever since Philip's arrival at the mating age she had divided all young women into two classes—those who were suitable for her son, and those who were not. She now discovered that she had made no provision for a third class—those who might reject Philip. What incredible reason could Constance Valgrave have for her refusal? She felt at once piqued, indignant and intensely relieved. She resented the girl's action and admired it.

"There must be some grave difficulty in her life. She is unnaturally sad and reserved. Whatever it is, I think you would find it the reason for her refusal of you."

"Her not caring for me might seem to her sufficient reason."

His mother looked incredulous. "Do you think she does not care for you?"

"I cannot tell. She is not easy to read. I had hoped to make her care. I shall do it yet," he added with quiet emphasis.

"I am sorry for this complication. Whether she cares or whether she doesn't, it cannot be easy for her to live here in such close companionship with you. She

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might take refuge in flight. I do not wish to lose a good governess."

"I am sorry that that is the only light in which you regard her," he said reproachfully.

"It is not the only one, though under the circumstances it might naturally be so. I like her for herself. She is what I should wish a daughter of mine to be."

"There seems no end to her possibilities," he said earnestly. "She would be radiant if she were happy. That's one reason I've longed to create the change. But it doesn't make me unhappy that she refuses me. You can't be hopeless about the real things of life. You know that you have only to wait and they'll come to you."

This was not a new doctrine of his, but she had never known him to use it as a re-enforcement of patience in romance. He had been, indeed, always singularly impatient in his pursuits of chosen aims, even as a boy when he studied his Greek with an impetuosity which leapt to the poetical soul of it and sublimely disregarded the grammar. This attitude of quiet expectancy toward Constance Valgrave was not favorable to the plans invented by maternal caution.

"I should not wish you to wait only to be hurt at last," she commented.

"She could only be an inspiration to me whatever she did."

These were flights, indeed! She fell to wondering what hushed and hidden spell the girl had woven about him in the weeks of their association. Something more

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surely had drawn him than a pretty face and distrait manner. Was it some magnet of potential character behind the almost colorless exterior of Constance Valgrave's girlhood?

"You mean?" she asked, though she knew well enough what he meant. His answer might elucidate further the real riddle.

"I mean the caring is good in itself. Not that I shall rest in it. I shall give her time; then if she's not willing I'll take her anyway," he said, a light kindling in his eyes, the robber-spirit of the primitive man.

"You are prepared, evidently, for all fortunes," she said.

"Except that of losing her."

"Don't be too confident," his mother said. She had not been trained in the new creeds which make mental concentration the warrant for obtaining a desire; or which practice self-hypnotism in the name of religion. She had the tender timidity of old age which has known to the full how precarious are the joys of life, how sure its sorrows.

"You want me to leave a margin for fate? There is no such thing."

"No; I want you to leave a margin for the will of God," she answered solemnly; "that is the only reality."

"I should like to believe it."

"You will some day. You young men are driven into the wilderness of speculation. It won't harm you, if you don't stay there too long."

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"I don't think anything could harm me, except ceasing to find life wonderful."

They heard the sound of children's voices at that moment, and through the open window saw Constance with her charges returning from their morning walk.

"The children adore her," Philip said.

"That is obvious. It makes the dilemma greater."

"There is no dilemma, mother."

"Not in your eyes."

"Then all is easy," he urged. "I am the party of the first part."

Mrs. Mangan reflected a moment.

"I should like to know more about her. Perhaps I could win her confidence. Leave us alone together this evening after dinner."

"You will be good to her," he said jealously.

"Naturally, my son. I only want to be satisfied. If there's nothing wrong in her background, if her family is acceptable——"

"Of course, they are," he cried. "She is of aristocratic birth, if she is poor. That's perfectly clear. If you must go down to wretched physical details, look at her lovely hands, her delicate features, her carriage——everything."

His mother smiled. "I have not been unobservant of her charms. Before you go, I again ask this of you, to look at the matter from every side. Don't be too hasty."

"How is it possible to be too hasty when the lady lags?"

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"She is wise who lags when romance is in the question."

"You are siding with her. You must side with us both."

After dinner that evening Philip went with John to the schoolroom ostensibly to help him with a knotty problem of grammar, and Mrs. Mangan and Constance were left alone. The latter looked unusually 'girlish' in her dinner-gown of some white summer material. The older woman was glad of this impression, for it made it easier to begin a possible catechism.

The lamps were lit in the drawing-room, but the windows were open wide to the moon-lit wonder of the early summer night. On such nights it was difficult for Mrs. Mangan to keep her thoughts upon the affairs of the present. The voices of her dead children seemed to be calling to her from the wide lawns where they had once played. Their forms swept toward her out of the distant shadows. From some such inner vision she returned to Constance, sitting with her book in a circle of lamplight. She looked at her with new, keen interest. Even her disapproval of the situation did not prevent her from doing Constance justice. A soul indeed was there behind the diffident eyes and the sensitive grave mouth. Its dumb sorrow had spoken louder in the ears of Philip than the most ardent call of joy. She understood now.

Constance felt the quiet scrutiny, and longed to escape from it, as she longed to escape now from this house which had ceased to be a refuge. She had been

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planning all day some mode of departure which would not seem at once abrupt and ungrateful. She could not go as a deserter; yet she could not remain after the full revelation of yesterday—the hour, bitter and sweet, of Philip's confession of his love, sweeping her to the very threshold of a heaven she dared not enter.

Mrs. Mangan had difficulty in opening her subject. She did not wish to betray any knowledge of the situation, lest she should close the door finally upon her enterprise of winning this young girl's confidence. Constance looked but a slight creature to be mastered—a mere child, yet the older woman found no words to begin. She disdained to pry. To ask questions was an unpardonable indelicacy. She had an immense respect for the privacy of the neighbor whoever that neighbor might be. She began at last lamely:

“You are not working too hard, my dear?”

“I have scarcely enough work to do,” Constance answered.

“I thought you seemed tired. We must give you a week's vacation soon. I doubt if the children would consent to your longer absence.”

Constance hesitated. She saw an opening, but she was not sure of her own ability to play a part.

“It might be that I should have to go away soon in any case—and—and not return. Family matters——”

She could go no further. Her voice trembled. Mrs. Mangan seized her advantage.

“I hope your people are well. I understand that you are—an orphan?”

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"My mother is living," Constance said faintly.

"And you have good news of her."

"Yes, but I may have—to go."

Her look of distress silenced Mrs. Mangan. The questions she had asked seemed not worth the effort they had cost her. She changed the subject abruptly.

Soon after Constance rose and said good night. On the way to her room she passed the schoolroom. The door was open, and she saw a pretty picture—two heads, one brown, one gold, bent over a book in absorbed companionship. She hastened on lest she should be seen, but the vision was a ray of light across an evening of desolate thoughts. Ever since Philip's declaration of his love she had lived in a kind of numbing terror, which forbade all natural action and emotion. She dreaded to look into her own heart lest she should find there the answer to his importunate questions. Yet she knew that by the clairaudience of his own awakened spirit he must have heard the answer, clear and high above her denial of its very existence.

CHAPTER XXXVII

NOT long after this Philip Mangan went away, ostensibly to attend to some business interests for his mother, but really to insure Constance's remaining in the household. With a lover's intuition he saw that she could not long endure the strained position in which he had placed her. She must either yield or flee. To withdraw himself might hasten her yielding. He did not care to face the second contingency.

Constance was relieved to have him gone, yet his absence took the gold thread from her days. She tried to become absorbed in her teaching, but a film of tediousness made all things evenly gray. Do what she would, her thoughts wandered to Philip, and when they were not with him they were, oddly enough, with her mother—not as she had last seen her in Broadhurst, a strange creature despoiled of the mask of years; but her mother in Paris as she had appeared to Constance's childish fancy, the most beautiful lady in that fair city. She saw her buying flowers at the stalls near the Madeleine. She heard her again crooning a queer little French song to put her baby asleep. She saw her waiting in the stiff convent parlor—her sweet, dead mother!

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Through her pre-occupation she was aware that Mrs. Mangan was observing her closely. Constance believed that Philip had told his mother of his love, and she wondered if Mrs. Mangan divined the real reason for her refusal of it. She felt sometimes that the disgrace of her birth must be written in capital letters upon her. She had on days of nervous tension, morbid impulses to proclaim the fact that she was an inter-loper in the good world of family life.

She went one evening, when the children were asleep, and Mrs. Mangan had retired to her own apartments, through the grounds to the river, now mysteriously gay with the thousand reflections of a high, full moon. The boat was in its place by the tiny dock, and she stepped into it and took the oars and rowed herself to the island. She went to her favorite seat with its view of the gardens. The night wind, stirring the leaves above her, was heavy with the scent of roses. The wash of the water on the pebbled shores sounded loud in the deep stillness.

She sat for a long time drinking strength from this chalice of night and solitude. Great as the shock had been which had sent her into exile, it could not altogether subdue her young vitality. Her spirit inevitably bounded toward the sunlight when released from the pressure of thought. She knew herself a being made for joy, for all the wholesome and happy aspects of existence. On this evening under the soothing influences of her surroundings, she allowed herself a truancy into the land of her heart's desire. She imag-

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ined herself with every fitting antecedent to make her acceptable to Philip; then from that point of departure she took her road into elysium, mingling possible joys with the bright days already hers. She recalled his walks and talks with her when the children made up a contented quartette, picnickers on the golden swards of their dream-countries. She wished that they had all remained in this playtime, but it had gradually turned for her and for Philip into the hour of destiny.

She was roused from her reverie after a while by the sound of her name softly called. She could see no one at first, and she rose, half-frightened, to answer this summons from the air, or, as she believed, from her own longing fancy.

"Constance, come and get me. I am here on the bank!"

Philip was standing on the garden-bank of the river. She ran to where she had moored the boat, her heart beating loud enough, she thought, for him to hear. She brought the little shell with a few quick strokes to where he stood, a dominant figure, no dream, but a comforting reality.

"I returned unexpectedly to-night," he explained. "Take me to your island."

She stepped out of the boat and handed him the oars.

"Do you imagine that I am going there alone?" reproach was in his voice.

"I cannot go with you," she answered.

"Why not?"

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"It is late. I must return to the house."

"Don't leave me," he entreated. "I have been looking for you everywhere. I must speak with you."

She faced him piteously, holding out invisible hands of protest. He saw the change a fortnight had wrought in her. She looked etherealized, yet to his expectant imagination, ready to tremble into joy; a being he must draw surely into the roseate certainties where he had dwelt for weeks.

"I need you. Let us go together." Without further discussion he put her in the boat and took the oars. A moment more and they were at the island. They had never before been alone together there.

He led her to the rustic bench, and seated himself beside her in silence that was for her no silence, but palpitated with his voice joined to many other voices from old, dim stories; and sweet, half-forgotten legends, all woven in a new love-tale that no other woman had ever heard. The wonder of it was overcoming her scruples. The beauty of the summer night became an ally of her heart, luring it to yield to the spell of an unseen and greater loveliness.

He spoke at last—but with no poetical ambiguity.

"Why are you holding me away? Don't you know that we belong to each other?"

"There's no going on," she whispered.

"Why not?"

She was silent.

"Won't you trust me—dear?" he pleaded.

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"I am not what—" she hesitated, but it was to control her voice, not to seek for words—"what you think I am. If you knew all about me, you would not care for me."

He drew back with an intolerable thought, but, it died in the moment of its birth. Whatever sin or suffering was in this girl's life was vicarious. He was sure of that.

"I know all I wish to know—that I love you. Nothing else matters."

She remained mute, but he saw the sudden joy in her face and its sudden passing.

"Yes, I do wish to know something more," he added. "I wish to know that you love me."

If she could only tell him that she did; that he meant life and happiness to her and the right to hope again. Her lips trembled, but the great word remained unuttered.

"Can you give me no hope?"

"None."

"You—send me away?"

"No; I shall go away."

"Where?"

"I do not know," she answered faintly.

"To your home?"

"I have none."

"I am your home!"

She was silent, her spirit resting upon these words in a brief beatitude before her next lonely flight from him.

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"You cannot wander, dearest. Tell me, is it because you do not love me?"

"No."

The word was spoken as softly as a sigh, but it opened the heavens to him, and he entered with her.

"Ah! then nothing matters!" he cried.

He leaned toward her and took her hand. The green fire of the spring stole through her veins in quickening currents of power. All her being yearned to his, yet dwelling as she had so long in the more spiritual planes of existence, she but half-understood the force which drew her to him. She only knew that it was enchantingly sweet and that it linked the earth to the stars. But her obsession by joy was momentary. She drew back, then rose suddenly.

"I must go! I can't stay with you! I am doing you a great wrong."

Her voice, as well as her words, entreated him, and he did not seek to detain her. She went to the boat, and he followed her reluctantly. When they were again on the garden-bank, she turned and appealed to him. "Please leave me here. Don't make it hard for me."

He walked slowly away; slowly, that she might, perchance, call him back to her, but he heard only the drowsy flow of the water and the sweep of the night wind in the trees.

When he was quite out of sight she took a few steps in the direction he had gone, then because she felt weak and tired, she seated herself on a bench on

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the water's edge. The womanhood in her was being born with all the travail which attends the second, spiritual birth, but this she did not know. She knew only that she was wracked and torn, and that before her lay a rough road. All roads would be rough if he were not beside her.

Philip reached the house, only to turn back again, to retrace his steps down the garden paths, across the wide lawns to the spot where he had left her. She was not aware of his presence until he was close beside her. Then she rose with a little cry. They stood facing each other in a silence which absorbed all conflict, drawing it upward and inward to the throbbing unity of their passion. In another moment he had clasped her to him, yielding, beatified, rapt beyond her questions into her lawful ecstasy. For a brief instant she endured its sharpness, wishing to die while she felt his kiss. Then she drew from him, again dual, again in flight.

She reached her room breathless and trembling like a hunted thing, but the four walls could not keep out the fleet-footed presences that had run there before her, couriers of tidings whose import was at last becoming clear to her. She was weighed down by more than her rejection of Philip, confused by more than the knowledge of her own response to his love. When, hoping to calm herself, she knelt in prayer, the old familiar words did not conduct her into God's presence. Between her and Deity was a veil of blinding light—the light of a new revelation. Accusing voices

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sounded in her ears; accusing not others, but herself of sin and hardness. The walls she had built about her were crumbling, and she saw beyond them wide lands which her feet had never traveled; and felt the buffet-ing of uncharted winds. His kiss had thrown the portals of intuition open, Janus-like, upon the past and future. She cowered, refusing to look.

All night she tossed sleepless upon her bed. At dawn she could bear her own companionship no longer. She rose, and throwing on a dressing-gown, went into the night-nursery where Wilhelmina lay in rosy slumber. Constance put her hot forehead down upon the pillow. The child awoke and came from her dreams with a smile.

"My dear," she said with her customary, quick comprehension, "did you get lonely?"

"I am afraid I did."

Wilhelmina moved over. "Lie down here," she said hospitably. "You'll excuse me if I should go to sleep again. It is so early."

She lay down, and the child's presence soothed and comforted her. One clear ray of light shone persistently above the storm and wrack of the past hours, at once a judgment and a beacon, and formed itself at last into words. She said them over and over in ever-growing wonder; in an ever-growing keenness of remorse:

"This is what my mother felt—this is what she felt! I must go to my mother!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

LOVE comes to some natures as a shutting-out of the world and society by intense concentration on one human being; and this is nearly always the case when it is happy and unobstructed. It is a platitude that two happy lovers could almost decivilize a whole community by their oblivion of their neighbors, their emphasis on personal desire. But thwarted or unhappy emotion has often the effect of linking the individual through sympathetic understanding to the whole human race. Constance knew now the force of the passion that in the siege of Paris had leapt to its goal over both the moral and social law. But she shrank from what was involved in this new comprehension; and from its arraignment of her own conduct and motives in leaving her mother. She could not know too quickly what she had been and done, lest the weight of knowledge crush her. She put out feeble hands of sophistry; and, like all persons warding off the plea of love, she took refuge in self-justification. Had not her mother deceived her for years, after wronging her in the hour of her conception? Had she, Constance, not done her duty, even under this cruel wrong, retaining the outward forms of filial obligation? She clung desperately to the law and the letter,

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which, to those about to leave its rule, appears so much milder and easier of following than the incredible demands of the Gospel, as bleak as a moor about a sheltered little house.

In the afternoon Philip sent a message to her, asking her if he might speak with her in the library. He had evidently passed beyond the stage where he waited upon opportunity. This deliberate pressing of his claim in the stereotyped hours of high daylight made her feel to the full the necessity of a speedy decision regarding her future plans. When she went down to the library she knew what it would be.

He came to meet her with a manner commingled of deference and authority. She waited for him to speak.

"You may think that I have here to distress you again, Constance—and maybe you are right. I have to distress you to gain what I am sure is for the happiness of us both." All his boyishness had departed. With a boy she could deal, but she had no weapons to combat the strength of a full-grown purpose. "I love you," he went on with quiet insistence, "and you love me, or at least you have never said that you do not. I cannot believe there is anything concerning you and me alone that could keep us apart; and what concerns other people, would have still less strength. I cannot understand, therefore, why you put me from you."

She made no answer.

"You love me, Constance?"

She looked at him—and he knew.

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"And I love you, dearest. Why are we apart?"

Her lips quivered. "I cannot tell you."

"You do not trust me."

"I am sparing you."

"Sparing me what? Don't you know that I would shoulder willingly any trouble of yours?"

"You could not shoulder it. You simply could not deal with it. It is nothing that can ever be changed."

"Then forget it all."

His young, intense face was again close to hers, a liturgy of pleading in it. Temptation enveloped her; the fruit of her belief that she stood between irreconcilable forces. Her mother's image grew dim as Philip pressed his claim. Why not blot out her whole past life, that specious fabric built on the sins of other people! Had they not bestowed upon her at her birth moral freedom of the ties of blood. She had no family in the legal and social sense. Why not accept the advantages! He was ready to take her as she was, without father, without mother, without descent.

"Put it out of your mind, whatever it is. Say now that you are willing to trust everything to me."

He watched her with grave solicitation conscious of a greater struggle within her than he could follow, even with the best effort of sympathy. But the dawn's revelation had not been concerning the claims of self. She had caught a glimpse of a wider world, and already it summoned her allegiance.

"I could not forget it, Philip. I should have to tell you the truth, and the truth would change everything."

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No alternative had indeed presented itself to her. Philip's pride of race, his belief in the legacies of honor were not adolescent fancies. She was sure that he could never overlook the stain upon her birth.

"You do not really believe in me, then," he said.

She shrank from his accusation. "Why do you say that?"

"You would trust me if you did. You make my feeling subject to things outside itself. It is not that."

She believed his words, but she still trembled in the cowardice of the past months.

He waited for her to speak, but as she did not, he went on:

"You, yourself, do not care as you should, if you fear and doubt."

She believed in the sincerity of his ignorance, but not of his enlightenment. At the best he would be forced to play a part to save her from being wounded. Another reason strengthened her purpose of silence. She felt that she would rather lose a thousand loves than reveal her mother as aught but what she had once dreamed her. The truth should never be known through herself, Constance, whatever happened.

"I do not doubt you."

"Then why do you feel that anything could be a barrier between us?"

She was silent.

"Perfect love casts out fear, Constance."

"I want you to forget me," she pleaded. "I am going away."

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He was prepared for this, but he had the incredibility of all lovers, their incapacity to imagine anything contrary to their dream.

"Soon?"

"At once."

"I shall follow you."

"You would not if I asked you not to."

"It would do no good after all, so long as our faith and love are unequal."

She made no attempt to answer him, and he himself departed on the crest of his advantage lest her stricken face should change him from a judge to a pleader.

An hour later she went to his mother's sitting room. Mrs. Mangan received her with her usual cordiality, the neutral ground from which she had for weeks watched this drama. She had given but little thought, oddly enough, to Constance's part in the matter. The girl seemed in some way protected, as if a previous crisis had produced an immune condition. On this occasion, however, her face was stamped with the history of more than Philip's romance—her own defeated love. Mrs. Mangan foresaw at once capitulation and purposes of flight. Constance's opening words seemed rather a corollary than an announcement.

"I've come to tell you, Mrs. Mangan, that what we spoke of the other evening has drawn nearer—I mean the necessity—I have to go home—I am needed."

She stumbled, unused as she was to equivocation.

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Mrs. Mangan hastened to her rescue. A load was lifted from her shoulders, and she could not assent too quickly to the wisdom of Constance's departure, but she took care to preserve the integrity of the fiction they had set up between them. She sincerely liked her children's governess, now more than ever, but her maternal love and jealous weighing of the future were stronger.

"I am very sorry—but you must go of course if you are needed."

She paused, for she feared to ask a question which might go too near or too far beyond the obvious motive for Constance's leaving. Both had a narrow line to walk on, and both knew it.

"You will be better for a vacation——"

"It may be that I cannot—return, Mrs. Mangan."

Her voice was Spartan. The older woman looked at her with kindling admiration. How came it that this young girl, evidently in love with Philip, was exercising a wisdom beyond her years and rejecting a short cut to happiness and worldly advantage. Whatever the determining cause she was raised in Mrs. Mangan's estimation to a far height of worth.

"I shall not attempt to supply your place, whatever the event," she said graciously. "You have more than satisfied me—and the children are devoted to you."

Tears came to Constance's eyes—her first sign of emotion.

"Would it be convenient if I left within a week, Mrs. Mangan?"

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"If it is really imperative."

"I fear it is. My—my mother needs me."

"In that case there is nothing to say. If my daughters had lived I should have wished them always by my side. Do you look like your mother?"

Constance flushed. A wave of the old idealism swept over her, the old desire to reveal her mother to strangers as the fairest of all.

"In some ways—but she is beautiful."

Her resolution taken, she was feverishly anxious to carry it out, and the next few days were full of conflicting emotions. Above the grief at leaving Philip, grief too deep to be stormy, rose continually a passion of expectation. The old cord between her mother and herself, seemed actually made visible by force of its pulsations. Tenderness, remorse, compassion, and then again, the old resentment of a lifelong wrong, took each its temporary place in her heart. She was leaving life and love behind her, but she knew also that she was going to life and love—life stripped of its gay colors, and love that had known sorrow, but still bearing within it the hope that is ever the companion of vitality.

Philip made no attempt either to see her or to avoid her during these days; and unconsciously wounded her a hundred times, since to the sensitive imagination of lovers, every commonplace is fraught with meaning. She saw that for the time at least, he had accepted her verdict, and this caused her pain, as such acquiescence

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is wont to do. Yet in her heart she believed that his obedience had in it little of egotism, and her judgment in this was sure. He was refusing either for himself or her to cheapen the price of her confidence.

She did not write to her mother of her intention to return, partly because she could not explain it on paper, and partly because she half-hoped, as human nature often does in the crises of existence, for some intervening god to work a miracle.

The night before her departure found her passed everything but the pain of separation. Philip had left suddenly in the morning on a journey, without a word of farewell to her, and the day had been dreadful in its length of summer hours. John had been told of her leaving, and he hung about her with sweet, solicitous affection. For some reason they had not told Wilhelmina.

Constance was lying on her bed, seeking sleep in vain, when the door opened softly, and she saw a little figure framed against the lighted hallway.

"Are you awake, my dear?" a sweet voice asked.

"Yes, girlic."

"They have only just told me, or rather I heard two of the servants speak of it on their way upstairs. The nursery door was open, and I was awake, because all day I have suspected something, but nothing so bad as this. Is it true?"

"Yes, Wilhelmina. Come to me."

She held out her arms, and the child trotted across

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the room and climbed into the bed. She nestled close to Constance, and put her dark head in the hollow of the protecting arm. They lay still a long time. Constance spoke at last, pressing the dainty form to her in sudden loneliness of misery.

"My baby! You won't forget me."

A sob came from the pillow, then a stormy voice.

"I'll never forgive them for not telling me. I shall be bad for the next three months, totally bad and depraved!"

"Oh, no, sweetheart."

"I shall, indeed! They are always hurting me; I shall hurt them hard."

"Not Uncle—Philip."

"Yes—Uncle Philip, too."

"But you love me—if I should ask you to be good to him—to help him to be happy—to try——"

The child suddenly sat up.

"Don't ask too much of me. You don't know what my next governess may be. I hate her now, and—and I shall make her sorry that she came."

Constance held out her arms.

"Come. I am going to-morrow," she said coaxingly.

The child looked long at her. She shook her head, and moved away from the outstretched arms.

"It will only make it harder for me."

"Come. I need you."

There was a moment's hesitation, then a small

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tempest of love flew back to her with a myriad of caresses. With her arms around Wilhelmina, the first fruit of whose surrender was sleep, Constance clasped to her breast a shield against the oppressors that lurk in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXXIX

WHY are you returning to-morrow?"

"Because you do not need me; you are almost well enough to take charge of the house."

"But that makes no difference. I do need you. I wish you would stay."

Isabel looked as if she would like to elaborate her invitation, but her close association with her sister-in-law during the past weeks had infused into her something of Eleanor's own simplicity of speech.

"It is better for me to go. I have my work to do, and I feel at last as if I could work."

"You did not paint much last winter," Isabel said with hesitation, being uneasily conscious that she had known too little of Eleanor's life on the farm.

"I could not work steadily, and that is the only work that counts."

"I—I suppose you missed Constance."

Eleanor turned away her head. "I am—always missing her."

Isabel leaned from her invalid chair and took Eleanor's hand for a moment with a shy gesture that was meant for a caress. "I am glad now that I never

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had a little girl," she said. "Your children always leave you by one road or another."

"Yes."

They sat silent for a while. Through the opened windows they could see the heavy July foliage stirred faintly by the breeze. The sunshine lay hot on the lawns and garish geranium beds. Nature was in full riot of her power, and Eleanor felt an answering vitality in her own veins, the healthy desire to work and to hope again, though for what she scarcely knew. These weeks of continued labor for others had, at least, killed in her the morbidity which on the farm was threatening, she believed at times, her mental balance itself. She was beginning to see dimly, but surely, that on her own attitude toward the world, and not on the world's attitude toward her, depended her peace of mind; and for the present her world was her brother's household. It had been, on the whole, a warm nest in which to learn a new doctrine; for William and Edmund had leaned on her strength, and Edmund at least, had surrounded her with affection. He had compromised with his mother in the matter of his departure from the household, and he was now fitting up a suite of rooms in a disused wing for his own and his Uncle Thomas's occupancy. Thomas's becoming a member of his brother's family circle, seemed strange to Eleanor, but she reflected that he had the habit of leaning, and in his nephew he found a prop more congenial than his stepson. She was beginning to understand, too, how much a familiar environment

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might mean to his timid soul. There might even be moral safety and comfort in the well-known pattern of a wallpaper!

Isabel broke in upon her reflections querulously.

"What are you thinking about? I wish you'd tell me some of your thoughts."

"They are not always worth sharing. I was thinking just then of Thomas—of his coming here."

"It seems strange to you, I suppose."

"Yes, it does," Eleanor replied with a frankness which concealed diplomacy. "I have never thought, to use the old adage, that 'one roof was large enough to cover two families.'"

"It shall be this time," Isabel answered with some asperity. "I don't believe Tom has been really comfortable for years. Magnus had a fast-day nearly every other day, and then not a scrap of meat was allowed in the house. When I get well I am going to have a table for Thomas that will open his eyes."

"And you can do it," Eleanor said, still pursuing the diplomatic course. "You're a wonderful house-keeper, Isabel."

"Eleanor?"

"Yes."

"I—I never really thought you—wicked."

A smile flickered over Eleanor's face.

"You thought what you had been taught to think; and you will have to think it again on the day when you put on your street clothes. But I understand, Isabel, and I don't blame you."

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There was a finality in her voice which closed the subject. Isabel shut her eyes with a fretful sigh. She had wished her avowal to be received with gratitude. How stubbornly Eleanor refused to be a sinner! It was like bullying a halo out of the Lord when good folk were whimpering for one. Perhaps it was just as well she was going to-morrow—better than that she should linger on to be asked suddenly some morning for the keys of the pantries and linen closets. She rather pitied her sister-in-law for having to give them up.

CHAPTER XL

ELEANOR took leave of her sister-in-law next day with a kiss and a promise to see her again before very long. At the last moment Isabel forgot her resurrected scruples and returned the kiss warmly, conscious that she would at least miss greatly Eleanor's physical presence. Something intangibly soft and sweet was always about her, suggestive of delicate odors and low lights. She was like the end of the day with its luxuries of rest, its invitations to mystery.

Edmund conducted her downstairs to the porch, where his father was waiting to drive her up to the farm.

"You and I do not say good-bye, Aunt Eleanor."

"No, we shall never say that," she answered.

"There's no use thanking you; for you always have more gifts. I do not know what we'll do without you."

"There's much you, yourself, can do. Your mother depends on you so for her happiness, more than on anyone else."

"I wish she didn't, for I'll be sure to have a relapse from virtue. But I'll look out for her. I'll do all I can. It will be a good thing having Uncle Tom here.

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I have discovered a dawning sense of humor in him, which I imagine didn't have much outlet at the rectory."

"You can keep them all together, if you try."

"I'll do my best, though myself in the character of a keystone in the family arch is a novel idea."

William was silent as they drove through the town, but when the horses had settled to their hill-climbing, he turned to his sister with a certain awkwardness of manner which, from long experience, she knew presaged an attempt to say something gracious. William was always stealthily urbane, as if the quality held an illicit element.

"You've been a wonderful help in this time of trouble. I didn't—I didn't know you were so capable."

"Did you think I could do nothing but paint pictures, William?"

"Well, artistic and literary women are not as a rule good housekeepers," he announced.

She laughed.

"How you cling to tradition!"

"I wish there was something I could do for you," he went on. "I haven't been much of a prop."

"We are at least at peace with each other," she answered.

"Yes, that is good; but I wish I could do something for you. You can't end your days on Sutro's farm."

"I don't intend to."

"If I may ask the question, are you using your money?"

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"Yes, I am using it. I cannot feel as Constance did about it. I could take anything from Godfrey because of what he meant to me."

"I am glad," he answered, but she saw that the practical aspect of the matter alone appealed to him.

"There is something you can do for me," she said after a while.

"What is it?" he asked eagerly.

"Make Thomas feel that he has been successful in life. He has had such a dejected existence."

"I've raised his salary. I've given him an interest in the business," William said complacently.

"Ah, but I didn't mean that. I meant make him feel that he is one of you when he comes to live with you."

"I will. I am tired of division—tired, with all my soul." He turned to her impulsively. "I wish that you would live with us, too."

"I couldn't, because I'm a woman."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that men are out in the world wrestling with big problems, while women are shut up with each other and with domestic banalities. You don't know the depressing aspect of a sitting-room at half-past ten in the morning, or what affliction may lie in giving your order to the butcher over the telephone."

She spoke banteringly, the old instinct to mock at the things he took for granted, uppermost for the moment.

"You were never domestic," he said mildly, "though you are such a good housekeeper."

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"No; I was never domestic. But the duties of housekeeping don't depress me as much as the recurrence of them. They seem a treadmill leading nowhere, except, perhaps, to the employment agencies."

He looked at her as she spoke, at the sensitive mouth, the expectant eyes, the indomitable youth of her face under its lines of care. Was this impatience of the commonplace the secret of her wandering? Oh! if he had known long, long ago!

"Well, I like you as you are, Nell. Getting the best lamb chops isn't the whole of life."

"No, there's a big margin."

When she reached the farmhouse she deferred as long as she could the going to her rooms, for she was beginning to dread again the ghosts of loneliness and fear that lurked in their corners. She had not realized how much healing had been in the mere fact of her being for the time a member of a family circle, and of use to that circle. Was it her penalty, she asked herself, as she walked that evening through the fragrant gloom of the garden, to be always excluded from social life, because she had once defied society? And wherein lay the justice of excluding the woman while the man was free to go on establishing other anti-social conditions?

The old insoluble question haunted her, but her former bitterness in considering it had passed away with the personal vanity that had died when, after a struggle, she had consented to go down to Isabel. To justify herself seemed no longer the main issue; nor

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did the arraignment of society bring comfort. She was seeing that the solution lay in a new order of loving—one with few comforts and perhaps with no rewards; one which comprehended rather than asked for comprehension.

She wandered to the edge of the garden, and gazed down over the valleys with their scattered lights. In each of those homes human nature's unassuageable thirst for happiness was seeking some form of satisfaction. Would they only give up the quest at last in the chill of a great Negation? Or was there warmth and light beyond the decaying universes, some inglenook created by the final Pity?

She tried to put the thoughts from her, and to turn her mind to the friendly nearby aspects of low-bending fruit trees and crowding flowers, fast losing their colors as night came down. Even as a girl, she had had sick moments of over-realization of the immensities of existence; had brooded over the dreadful voids of space and time and the mystery of creation, until to go and play with a kitten had seemed the only way to save her sanity. The old fear clutched at her heart again, and she had to reassure herself by saying, "It is, after all, my own brain that creates this terror." She put it from her as best she could, and to relieve the tension started to walk along the road that curved past the garden.

Night met her on the way with its warm odors of summer fields, and the comfort of a world about to go to sleep. Peace came to her in the thought that she

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was one with this drowsy life about her, and should share its unconcern.

As she walked slowly along, she was aware of a woman's figure approaching through the dimness. The familiarity of the slender outline made her heart beat quickly for a moment, but she put the idea from her as incredible. Some farmer's daughter was returning late to her home.

The figure came nearer and nearer, and its now painful resemblance to one wildly beloved, made Eleanor shiver with the cold of a new fear—that this might be hallucination. She stood quite still, hearing the labored beating of her own heart, her lips parted, her eyes fixed on what she believed was a vision.

"Mother!"

Eleanor did not answer.

"Mother, it is Constance."

"*Constance!*"

"Yes—dearest."

A happy cry rang on the night air. Eleanor stretched out her arms. She feared, lest she should embrace a wraith, a shadow, a dream-child, still incredulous that her daughter stood before her. But Constance already pressed against her. She felt her kisses, her broken loving words. Eleanor suddenly thrust her at arms length, to question again, and falter, and then to snatch her back, jealous of that short interval, to hold her close in bewildered ecstatic silence.

"You want me! You forgive me!" Constance cried.

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The incredible words flung open vaster portals. Eleanor trembled and dared not enter.

"Forgive you, dearest! Can you forgive your mother!"

"But I wronged you. I left you when you needed me. I was hard, cruel, unjust!"

Her passionate arraignment of herself lit up for Eleanor the long path they would travel henceforth together. It stretched beyond the seas to their old home in Paris, beyond that to softly gliding days of frank and fearless companionship. The vision overpowered her with its sweetness.

"Say nothing more," she entreated. "We are together. Nothing matters but that."

She led her daughter up to the farmhouse. When she had lighted the lamps in the sitting-room, she took one and held it high that its light might fall full upon Constance.

"You look different, sweetheart. I am jealous of these months. You are taller."

"I cannot be, mother."

"There is a change. I don't know what it is. But nothing matters. You are back. You wanted to come," she added with a searching look. "You came of your own free will, dearest?"

Constance's arms enfolded her.

"How can you ask! Let us talk of the future, not the past. I've come to be with you always."

Eleanor's face lighted like a child's.

"Always!"

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"Yes, always. I can never make up to you my desertion."

"But I don't want anything made up to me. I only want your love."

The half-fearful look in Eleanor's eyes revealed more clearly than words her months of solitary suffering, betrayed indeed an apprehension that passed the boundaries of the normal. Keen remorse filled Constance, awakening in her a longing to protect and soothe, to drive away by her ministrations the shadows of these weeks of separation. She drew her mother closer.

"You and I together!" she whispered. "Just you and I."

At midnight Constance was sleeping heavily, worn-out with the excitement of her return, but Eleanor kept vigil. She lay beside her daughter as still as a figure on a tomb. One arm was around Constance's waist, and the girl's head was pillowed on her mother's breast. The watcher went over and over the events of the evening as over the beads of a rosary. The dim light from a shaded candle revealed to Eleanor a maturity in her daughter's face new to her. Even in the still lips and closed eyes there was a look of comprehension—and though not one word had passed between them concerning the sword that had separated them, that Constance comprehended was the fact which stood out most clearly from the blessed tumults of the evening. She knew and understood—and forgave! This was the bliss that racked the mother like physical

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pain. She had her here—her daughter, her baby, her little maid, with no terror of deceit between them, no bitterness of shame. Constance knew—yet loved her; Constance loved her—yet knew! All through the night this divine litany of love was sung in the mother's heart, as she lay sleepless, amazed, beatified.

But with the dawn came a new realization, the fruit of this long vigil, this rapture of recovery. Her eyes were washed with joy only to see too clearly. Could Constance comprehend and forgive unless she herself loved—knew in herself the force of that power which moves the sun and all the stars! Who had made her feel it?

She hated the thought and put it from her jealousy. She would not admit it again. They would look neither forward, nor back. They would live in a sweet communion of the present, happy as in the old days of that long, untroubled childhood, which had been as much hers as her daughter's. No third person should come between them, reviving the old shame; bringing in again society with its narrow and unjust estimates, drawing Constance, perhaps, far away from her mother.

The girl stirred in her sleep, and began to speak. The words were disjointed, and at first unintelligible. Eleanor raised herself on her arm and listened, longing, yet dreading, to snatch some clue from the deeps of unconsciousness. At last she heard one word. Constance knitting her brows, as if awake, said:

“ Philip.”

CHAPTER XLI

AFTER this sleep became out of the question. Eleanor rose before it was fully light, taking care not to waken her daughter. The name she had heard rang in her ears with a presage of a trial that she had no will to face. That an intruder should mar this reunion seemed to her another of life's many ironies. Was "Philip" the Philip Mangan of her daughter's letters, mentioned, as she recalled now, but sparingly? It must be he.

When she was dressed she went out-of-doors, that she might think more clearly, and rid herself, if possible, of this febrile jealousy. The morning-world unrolled before her, dewy, sparkling and touched with a kind of heavenly lightness and gladness that an hour before she would have shared. She went through the gardens and over a by-path through the fields to a stile where she could rest unobserved.

The knowledge that Constance had not returned solely to be with her, robbed Eleanor of her new-found peace, and moved her to reproach her daughter. Yet she knew that her resentment was unjust. What did it matter, after all, who or what had turned her child's footsteps homeward, since she had come back full of love, and of tender sympathy.

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But the comfort of this reflection was soon exhausted. If Constance had passed into the need of other love than the maternal her mother could look forward to no real security of companionship. Eleanor drooped beneath the pressure of this thought; then her heart rose defiantly above her fears. She need not know the truth at once. She would go on in the assumption that they two were again the world to each other. She would ignore the lurking third person, meanwhile watching her daughter for the full warrant of their recovered happiness. If Constance were content her own conscience would be clear.

She returned to the farmhouse in a brighter mood. This postponement practically made the problem nonexistent. Her heart sang now with the morning. She saw the golden hours of their first day together. They would walk and ride and read in the old fashion. They would not speak of what had separated them. They would plan for their future—or better yet, they would live in the firm present. They were sure of much to-day!

When Eleanor entered the bedroom Constance was dressing. Sleep had restored her color, and filled her eyes with light. She looked beautiful and womanly. If she had dreamed, her dreams had left no trace of sadness. She greeted her mother with a happy expectant smile.

"You stole away. You left me. Where have you been?"

"Out in the fields. I was too happy to sleep."

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"You truant mother! Why didn't you wake me?"

"You needed your sleep."

"Well, we'll have the whole long day!"

Eleanor's eyes grew wistful.

"You've thought of it too—you've planned!"

"Of course. We are going for a walk. Then we'll read in the garden. Then I shall take you for a drive."

"I had thought of just those things," Eleanor exclaimed, with a child's eagerness. "We'll have hours and hours together. Oh, we'll take full toll."

It was unspeakably sweet to have Constance plan for her. The two breakfasted under the trees in the garden, waited on by Mrs. Sutro, who had decked the table with her choicest roses in honor of the occasion. She and her son had welcomed Constance warmly, for no one knew better than they how much her mother had needed her and longed for her. A gala air prevailed about the old farmhouse of gladness and relaxation.

But when mother and daughter strolled away to the uplands after the dews had dried, the high note struck at the morning's greeting failed somehow to be reached again. Constance was tender, solicitous, gentle, but Eleanor was conscious that her daughter's thoughts wandered. She did not always listen attentively. Her face in repose grew sad. Eleanor shortened the walk, her pleasure in it diminished. They would do better sitting together in the garden, she told herself.

But as the day wore on she was no nearer the full

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communion which both desired and both just failed of attaining. Their mutual resolve not to dwell on the past had shut too many avenues of conversation. Constance fresh from scenes and people unfamiliar to Eleanor was yet in the inevitable stage of readjustment. She had reasons for not wishing to speak much of the Mangan family to her mother, whose peace of mind would scarcely be insured by the knowledge of Philip's rejected suit. That her mother's mind should be at rest seemed to her now of the utmost importance—of far more value than her own happiness. Soul-sickness had looked from Eleanor's eyes, and the remembrance of it haunted her daughter.

The subject of the future was equally dangerous ground. To say she would stay with her mother always was a far different matter from facing a near departure to other shores, fixing her choice of destiny. She was beginning to realize, now that the first excitement of her return was over, what exactions this choice would make of her. She was committed to no easy task.

As the day drew to a close two people who loved each other became tired out in the effort to re-create a vanished phase of their existence. Eleanor sought to draw her daughter to her, yet shrank from drawing also the intervening months. She wanted to separate Constance from the events of these months, but in doing so she was conscious that the dismemberment impaired their full confidence. At last she pushed the barrier impatiently aside. They were driving over the

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hills in the late afternoon sunshine, talking of indifferent matters, when Eleanor said suddenly:

“Tell me about your little pupils. They must have been interesting children.”

This was safe enough. Constance prolonged the congenial subject. When it was exhausted her mother asked:

“And Philip Mangan! What was he like?”

Constance's face turned rosy beneath the drooping brim of her hat. She looked out over the fields. Then answered with a catch of her breath:

“He was—very interesting. He—oh, mother, please stop a moment! I must get those ox-eyed daisies.”

Eleanor stopped the carriage. When her daughter returned with the flowers, she made no further reference to Philip. Constance's voice and face had told her all, but she put the knowledge resolutely from her, saying to herself:

“Not now; but to-morrow. I must keep her mine to-day.”

CHAPTER XLII

BROADHURST heard the news of Constance's return to her mother with astonishment and distrust; and being denied reasons, invented them. Several theories were afloat, but the one acceptable to the majority was that her mother's story had become known and that she had, in consequence, lost her position. But the buzzing soon died away. Now that the town's suspicions regarding Mrs. Valgrave had been fully confirmed, it was ready to turn from her to the next promising mystery.

Francis Bradmore learned of the reunion with a fresh up-springing hope. Might not the mother now be willing to marry for the sake of the daughter? Eleanor's refusal had been given amid the uncertainties of her loneliness, and, doubtless, in an unhealthy state of her mind. He would seek her again and make one last attempt to fulfill his purpose.

He rode up to the farm one August morning and found the two women in the garden, Constance reading to her mother. He had time to observe them from a distance before they saw him, and he was impressed by the idea that Eleanor did not look as happy as a woman should whose beloved child has returned to her. Her face was no longer apathetic, but she had not passed, it was evident, to any sureness of joy. Some

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conflict of doubtful issue was reflected in her features. She came to meet him with a gracious smile of welcome, which lingered as he bowed to Constance. He thought that he had never seen the girl look so lovely, but she also seemed delicately obscured, as by a mist of tears. The maturity, furthered by struggle and sorrow, had softened the clear, confident outlines of youth. Her manner was pre-occupied, except when she spoke to her mother. He knew then that whatever the cause of this atmosphere of unrest, the bond between the two was as strong as ever.

After a time Constance excused herself, and went through the garden to the house. Both watched her as she walked away.

"She is charming!" he said.

"I wish no one in the world knew that but myself."

He felt, with an intuition not altogether masculine, her shrinking from the inevitable future loneliness, and he hastened to his argument.

"Let me help you to keep her by your side. Let me take you both out of this life and put you where you belong."

She sat very still, not looking at him but across the valley where that morning, as on many bygone mornings she had sought in the vague distance some beaconing light. Constance had been with her a month, a month full of tender joys but fuller still of apprehension, all the more present because ignored.

The temptation to choose the easy road at the expense, perhaps, of another's happiness, now came to

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her under the powerful logic of that selfish love which seeks to pluck out of the universe something to call its own, and hold its own against the appetite of even time and death. Through this marriage she could direct Constance's life by filling it with interests and pleasures which might delay for years the inevitable separation. And if she should marry, her mother's history could be effectually hidden behind her new position as Francis Bradmore's wife; Constance might even take his name.

On the other hand was Constance's young, yet fully-grown, love—Eleanor felt it like warm light about the girl—to which the currents of both their lives were converging, unless the older woman interfered with the passionate caution of a second great attempt to build a bridge over shimmering air, separating the God-begotten powers of cause and effect.

The struggle was sharp, but the balance swung at last to the clarity of sight born of the travail of the past months—the vision of love founded on truth and existing by the divine law of sacrifice.

Her arms fell suddenly to her side, but the man seated near her did not know that she had unclasped them in that moment from the only person whom she loved on earth.

"It isn't possible—but, oh, you've been a good friend!"

He did not shrink from the word this time. He knew that friendship was all that was left to him, and to this last bond he clung. He had no intention

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that Eleanor Valgrave should go wholly out of his life—as well banish flowers or music or any beauty that sets the spirit free for an instant from the bonds of the material. Certain women are liberators as others are jailers of souls, and her hand had always pointed the way to freedom. When he was with her he saw airy turrets against sunny skies.

He did not dispute her decision, and after some desultory conversation, he rose and took his leave and rode away through the misty August sunshine. He left behind him the best hope in life that he knew, but the lover's eternal optimism was already asserting itself. He would wait a year, two years, then go to her again.

Eleanor, meanwhile, was facing a perspective which was lost in the distances of the infinite. Her answer to Bradmore had precipitated an issue which for days had hung in solution in the troubled deeps of her consciousness. She knew now what she had to do, though her reasons for her action were only partly clear to her. The events of the past months, both outer and inner, had assisted her comprehension of why she had sinned against society guarding the sacred triangle of father, mother and child as the shrine from which must issue its true inspiration and direction. But she asked herself whether the individual, even more than the family, was not the unit of society, since the rectitude and moral safety of the family depends, after all, on the individual conscience of each member of it. So, step by step, she was forced to pass to a deeper con-

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ception of the problem; so found herself at last before a Presence whose recessions but carried into infinite planes these human links, the symbols of some perfected society finishing in solemn glory and amid a vaster setting the earthly beginnings—until all were One. How she had sinned against God was still a mystery to her—for she had yet to identify the human and the divine morality—but stimulating, not oppressive, calling her to an endless, and, therefore, satisfying quest. She had had her hour of insight, and she knew that it involved years of denial. She returned now from this flight against the sun weary in mind and body. But she must seek Constance and be assured of the truth.

She went slowly through the garden and slowly upstairs. On the landing she paused. Her daughter was seated by an open window, her hands lying listlessly in her lap. The girl alone and off her guard had evidently given herself up to sad reflections. Her whole figure drooped. Her face was pale within its circle of gold hair.

Eleanor spoke her name softly. She looked up startled, then with a smile of welcome, rose and went to meet her mother.

“You were thinking hard. What were you thinking of?”

A soft flush overspread Constance’s face.

“I was thinking of my life with the Mangans,” she answered, with the truthfulness which had always characterized her.

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"You have never told me, dearest, why you left there."

"I wanted to be with you. I wanted to come back to you." She put her cheek against her mother's.

"You dear baby!"

This was the cry that had sounded through the old, delicious days of little girlhood. Constance's eyes filled with tears.

"I never grew up for you—did I, mother?"

"Never! You'll always be the little thing I bathed and rocked to sleep and cuddled. Yet I know you have grown up. I see the great sign." Eleanor said tenderly.

"And what is that?"

"I think that you love someone, dear."

A wave of bright color swept over the girl's face, but she said nothing. She looked away, her breath coming quickly.

"I know it is true. You could not have forgiven me if you had not loved someone yourself."

"It was I who needed forgiveness. I left you when you needed me most."

"And you came back because you understood at last."

"Yes; but more than that. I wanted you; I needed you," she said earnestly, fearful lest her mother's discovery of her secret should create a gulf between them.

"Trust me, then. Tell me about Philip Mangan!"

"Mother!"

"Trust me, dear."

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"I do—but—it is all over, mother, quite over—long ago!"

Eleanor shook her head. "I cannot believe that. Tell me the story. Do you think your mother is outside such hopes, such wistfulness that a girl can feel? Oh, my child, I understand it all!"

Constance knelt suddenly beside her mother and put her head on her knee. She felt already the relief of sharing her secret, but she feared the outcome of confession. These weeks, however precious, had brought forth no solution of the problem.

"Tell me. It is Philip Mangan."

"Yes," she answered.

"He loves you?"

"Yes," more faintly.

"And you left there because you loved him?"

"Yes—oh, don't ask me anything more, mother. It can't be—it's over—all over." She lifted a pleading face.

"No, it isn't over. It's just beginning."

"I belong to you. I can't leave you."

Eleanor sat silent, the sword of the simple words turning and turning in her heart. Her daughter recognized her as set apart. By her own act years before she had placed herself outside the social order; and she must now, against her will, remain outside. Constance would share her exile because even her love was powerless to change a condition.

"You did not tell him—why you went away," she said at length.

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"I did not put it to the test. He doesn't know why I refused him. He knows only there's an obstacle."

"But you believe that the knowledge of your birth would make a difference to him."

"I wanted to be everything—everything that he delights in——"

"And family honor is one of these?"

Constance hid her face, pressing closer to her mother in remorseful tenderness: in a passion of protecting love. "Don't question me. I hurt you; hurt you with every word."

"Dearest, if he really loved you——"

Eleanor faltered, for she knew in her heart that even a love far on in grace may be bound by the claims of duty and tradition. This discord of her making was now sounding harshly in a new quarter.

"Tell me about him. Tell me the whole story," she said with quiet authority. "It will be a relief to you."

Constance raised her head, and the look in her mother's eyes brought her story to her lips. She told it tremblingly, but with ever-increasing pleasure in the recital, until she came to her refusal of Philip. Then she found it difficult to go on. Her self-communion during these past weeks had borne other fruit than the pain of self-denial. She was beginning to ask herself whether she had not been a coward; whether she had not failed in the first great mission of all lovers, to face time and tears and death and shame; to dare to go beyond them all to the appointed goal. Philip had

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begged her to trust him, and she had refused, thereby proving herself a laggard. Eleanor read her doubts in the halting narrative, but she said nothing. Constance came to her corollary.

"It is wrong of me to grieve. This has shown me many things."

"It hasn't shown you all unless you know that you belong more to him than to me."

"I belong to you both. I shall be faithful."

"You can't serve two masters, dearest."

Silence closed in upon them. Eleanor's words sounded in Constance's ears like an echo of her own thoughts. Her retreat to her mother had been, after all, but a begging of the issue, a choosing of the easier course. If she had loved enough would she not have welded all the conflicting elements of her existence into the one pure unity of her purpose? Would she not have told the truth and awaited the decision of heaven? Yet she knew that cowardice and perhaps deficient love had not been the only reason of her silence with Philip. She could not stain the white image of her mother, even to tell the truth. Still less could she do it now, raised as it was again to the old pedestal. She would call Philip instead to the ground of her recovered faith and augmented love, asking him to share in her filial devotion. She spoke with triumph, sure at last of her power to deal with the problem.

"I shall send for him, mother. I shall bring you together. He could not help but love you."

Eleanor bent over her.

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"And you would tell him the truth?"

Constance shook her head. "There is nothing to tell. You are the fairest, the truest——"

Her voice broke over the canonization. Eleanor raised her head, satisfied, sinewed by her child's love for the hard task still before her. Throughout Constance's story, her mother's wit had been in nimble exercise, seeking to pierce the veil of romance and find Philip's true features; to construct his background and his antecedents, to understand his temperament and his abilities. She believed he was all her daughter thought him—manly, generous and enthusiastic; but her faith wavered as she approached the practical aspects of the subject. It would be much if he espoused Constance, marked as she was with a social stigma. She could not ask him nor his people to receive herself as well; to believe in the face of such overwhelming contradiction as events offer that she was "the fairest, the truest." No! Constance should go to him alone.

"Do nothing now. Believe me, it is best to do nothing now," Eleanor said earnestly. "Let us live from day to day. Perhaps the road will open when you least expect it."

She spoke the platitudes to hide her new-born purpose, but to Constance they were in truth a door imprisoning her fresh outgoing hope which sought to transcend all difficulties. She believed that her mother shrank from the test, hurt as she had been by the experiences of the past year. And she, Constance,

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shared the doubt and the drawing back, despite her assumption of courage.

She was again called upon to choose between the well-beloved, and again she knew what her choice would be. But a gray vision of slow-creeping months and years rose before her.

Eleanor read her thoughts, but she gave no sign. She could hide her purpose better if Constance believed that a decision had been made. She returned to commonplaces.

"You haven't forgotten that the family will take supper with us this evening?"

"No; I hadn't forgotten it," Constance answered wearily.

Eleanor went on with her silent planning. She was reviewing in her mind the members of her family who might be qualified for the difficult and delicate task of ambassador to Philip Mangan, and the choice lay between Thomas and Edmund. Edmund's youth was in his favor as bringing him nearer to Philip—this person unknown to her, and yet seen in the vivid light of Constance's description, hauntingly familiar.

She spent the afternoon alone in her bedroom, planning for every contingency which might arise in the carrying out of her project. She arrived at last at the goal of her arrangements, weary in body and mind, and, therefore, "capable of fears."

CHAPTER XLIII

HAVE you any plans for the future? ”

Thomas spoke in a confidential voice, looking at William meanwhile lest he should be overheard. Supper was ended, and the family party was assembled on a porch of the farmhouse. Eleanor knew that it was probably the last time they would all be together, and a new tenderness for even the least congenial member of that circle softened the memories of the past months.

“I have plans which may be matured very soon,” she answered. “I shall probably return to Paris; but do not speak of this. Nothing is certain yet.”

He looked troubled and disappointed. “I am sorry to hear it, Nell. I had hoped that you could remain in Broadhurst, now that Constance is with you again. I stayed here myself partly to be near you,” he added with an accent of reproach.

She laid her hand for a moment over his.

“I know! I can’t explain my reasons now. You’ll understand later. More than my own interests are involved. I have to consider what is best for Constance.”

He sighed. “I do not want you to go. I waited so long for your return—twenty long years.”

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"You must visit me in Paris next year. I shall go feeling happier about you than I did. I am glad you are with William. He is a lonely person at the heart of him."

"I couldn't go with Magnus to the city," Thomas said simply. "We had drifted too far apart."

"I understand how you felt. Are matters going well now?"

"Smoothly on the whole. Edmund and I see things from much the same angle, and William often gropes toward us. Even Isabel—" he paused, and a smile flitted over his face.

"Isabel is kindly at heart. She only wants the fashion set for her."

"You set it, Eleanor."

"I had to. I was so much in need of kindness myself."

"You have fixed no date for leaving, have you?" he inquired anxiously.

"I have engaged passage provisionally in September, and I have written to some old friends in Paris to re-engage, if possible, my old quarters there."

He looked yearningly at her, feeling already the loneliness that her absence would create for him. He was at heart a dreamer, and Eleanor had in her own fashion ministered to his dreams.

"I am glad that Constance has come back to you. I am glad that she will be with you."

"I am not so sure that she can be with me, but I shall not leave her until I know she is happy."

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He felt that her words conveyed more than their surface meaning, but he said nothing.

"Will you do me a favor now? Will you ask Edmund to come to me? I have to see him on a matter of business. I shall tell you later what it is."

Thomas gave up his place to his nephew, and understanding from Eleanor's grave voice and manner that the business was important, he went over to William with the purpose of keeping him engaged in conversation. Isabel and Constance sat still further away, Constance listening patiently to her aunt's detailed account of her illness.

"I was afraid to come to you," Edmund said, "because I know that you are going to tell me something that will not make me particularly joyful. I've felt it in the air all evening."

"You are altogether too responsive; though you can nearly always count on upsetting news from me. I am a purveyor of difficulties, a stirrer-up of strange brews."

"And an extraordinary blessing," he said fervently. "Now tell me the worst."

"Listen, and don't comment, and look as if I were talking to you of anything commonplace. But it is really about Constance. You can do something for her and for me."

"Then you need only tell me what it is."

"What do you think the most natural thing that could happen to her?"

"Romance," he said briefly. He knew now.

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"Yes! And she's helpless—rather she's trying to reconcile what cannot be reconciled. I must push her from me—force events. You see?"

"Who is he?"

She told him the story.

"I knew it would be so," he commented. "She was made for someone as altogether suitable as this man seems to be. What is it you wish me to do?"

"I want you to see Philip Mangan, by right of being a near kinsman of Constance, and tell him the whole story."

"What—story?" he faltered.

"Mine."

"No!"

"Why not?"

"If he loves her—what difference does it make?" he said impatiently.

"Silence is a false pretence in this case—and he must know the truth. If, knowing it, he still wishes to marry her——"

"If he doesn't, he's a cad!" Edmund broke in hotly.

"His family pride is very strong as far as I can learn from Constance. A fusion of——"

She broke off, her face pale.

"And if he wishes to marry her—as, of course, he will?"

"Then ask him to fix a date when he can come here, but not before the tenth of next month."

"Why the tenth?" Edmund asked suspiciously.

"It has something to do with my own plans."

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"Shall I ask him to write to you—give him your address?"

"No; let him write to you—and give him your father's address. When he comes, he will see Constance there. He shall find her surrounded by her people, with a home——"

Her voice faltered. The burning of these first bridges was harder than she anticipated.

"You must tell him of me," she went on after a while, more calmly. "But you must not let him know where I am or what I intend to do—say simply, that I am returning to Europe. I shall not be here. I shall not be in any way involved. He can marry her as if she were, indeed, an orphan."

"But why do you choose this course?"

"Because it will make it easier for them both. I will be to him merely a name, a tradition. If I were present, the history of my life would be present, also. Much is forgiven to the dead and the absent."

"But why not wait and see what his attitude may be. If he is as devoted to her as he should be, he'll want to make her happy in every way."

"That is true in the ideal sense, but few of us are allowed to be idealists. With the best intentions in the world on both sides, there might yet be friction and misunderstanding. Constance would inevitably watch for omissions, for some slighting of my claims, for some faint disrespect, for some faint recalling, though unconscious, of my past years. And every pin-prick would be a sword's stab. But an unseen and tradi-

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tional woman would invite toleration, perhaps forgiveness."

He did not argue the point with her, for he knew that in the line of human limitation, she was right.

She was eager now to have them all gone and to be alone with Constance. Thomas and Edmund, who understood her moods better than the others, observed this desire and helped to further it by proposing an early departure.

When the leave-takings were over and the sound of wheels had died away in the distance, Constance came to her mother's side.

"You are very tired. You look as if something were troubling you. Tell me what it is."

A protecting maternal accent was in her voice, as if their positions had been reversed.

"Something is troubling me. But you, yourself, are not wholly happy, Constance."

"I could never be wholly unhappy while with you."

Her arm stole about her mother's waist. Eleanor drew her to her.

"That is negative. I want you to go on to any joys which may be awaiting you."

Constance was silent. She knew of but one supreme happiness, and that she had put from her. Her mother knew her secret now, but, like herself, hung helpless in the web of circumstance. They must the more surely comfort and support each other.

"Then let us live and work together—only let us

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work! You could open a studio. I could teach. We'd try——"

"I shall reopen my studio. I am going back to Paris."

Constance grew pale.

"When, dear?" she whispered.

"In September."

"And you will work again at your portraits?"

"I shall indeed."

"I am glad," Constance said in a low voice. "We'll be happier."

Eleanor drew her daughter's head down upon her shoulder.

"If you had to choose, dearest—tell me the truth—if you had to choose between——"

"I have chosen. Don't let us talk of it any more. I want you. I go with you." She spoke with conviction, but her words ended in a sigh. She seemed to go even then an immeasurable distance from Philip. She wondered if she could bear to be passive, to let events take their course. Yet if the separation had to be, it was better that it should be thorough, and there was always the blessedness of work. "We'll both be more content," she said hopefully. "I often wonder, mother, if Adam and Eve had remained in the garden if they wouldn't have contrived to find work for themselves, not an arcadian imitation, but the real thing, work to tire them out and make their bones ache."

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Eleanor, listening, knew why the overburdened heart sought the antidote of labor.

“You are a prophet, dearest. You shall be comforted.”

“We shall both be comforted.”

CHAPTER XLIV

MRS. MANGAN had dismissed for the day her two grandchildren, whose tuition she had undertaken for the present, rather than meet the problem of a new governess. The result, on the whole, had been satisfactory, though Wilhelmina, with perfect politeness of manner, had criticised the grand-maternal French accent; and John had carefully explained that contemporary research was undermining the character of Washington. Mrs. Mangan had more than once retreated from this depressing dismemberment of heroes by modern babes and sucklings into the only narratives one could be sure of—such as the Siege of Troy and the exploits of King Arthur. If these gave way, she could, *in extremis*, cling to Jack-the-Giant-Killer and Puss-in-Boots. She left the higher criticism to Wilhelmina and John.

On this August afternoon, when the sound of their voices had died away, her thoughts went instantly to a graver subject, one that had been uppermost for several weeks. To live in the house with a person whose spirit is searching for one withdrawn and beloved, is a condition barren of social elements. Mrs. Mangan beheld the form of her son Philip as a part

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of the household, but his comings and goings had even less than the comfort of spectral visitations. A soul without a body was to be preferred to a body without a soul. Meanwhile the young man kept doggedly at work, planning railroads long enough to reach the poles, but all too short to find the woman of his heart. He bent over his books and his drawing-boards until his eyes ached, but they were never opaque enough to hide a clear, oval face, framed in the traditional gold. It had been part of Constance's charm to him that she followed tradition closely in her young-girl aspect, as if in her own body she narrated the tender forgotten lives of long-ago sweet women, and prophesied by the same pure medium existences still to come.

He was thinking of her as usual when his mother knocked and entered. He rose and brought a chair for her, wondering that she was not, at this hour, taking her usual afternoon nap.

"You can look more interested, my son, because I have come to speak of Constance Valgrave," she said dryly.

He flushed. "My dear mother, I was not aware that I looked indifferent."

"Of course you were not. It is your unconsciousness of your manner that is beginning to affect my nerves. I want you to get ready to go away."

"Is it as bad as that, mother?"

"You are not a stimulating influence in the house, Philip; but I have not come here to reproach you. You are only what other men and women in love have

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been since the foundation of the world—self-absorbed. I wish to change this condition.”

“There is a royal road,” he answered. “I would have taken it if I had known where she went when she left us, but you—you withheld her address.”

The faintest reproach was in his voice; his devotion to her forbade more.

“I believed that I was doing what she wished. She had taken her stand in the matter for some good and sufficient reason. I did not think you had the right to overwhelm her judgment.”

“But if her heart were already won—” he urged.

“Time, not propinquity, is the best proof of the reality of an emotion. I wanted you to be sure, dear.”

The solicitous affection in her voice moved him deeply. He took her hand and pressed it to his lips.

“Such a careful mother!”

“Don’t think me a usurer in my demands upon you, Philip. I only want to meddle enough to prove your point. I have seen so many love affairs that were merely preparatory. But it is time I came to my errand. I am going to give you her address, at least the only one I have. You can go to her and perhaps——”

“You’re wonderful!” he exclaimed, “because, you know, you don’t want me to marry.”

“Of course not. I am a normal mother. But I know Constance Valgrave—at least I think I do,” she added sagely, “and I think she might make you happy.”

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We had every chance to observe her at close range, and she never failed us."

"My making her happy is the point," he said valiantly. "Mother, why did you let her go?"

"How could I keep her, my son?"

"You could have made her tell what her secret was. I am sure it was some exaggerated sense of honor."

"No; it was something more real. A girl of twenty or thereabouts, doesn't create smoke to darken her own sky."

"Perhaps you are right; but I shall soon know. I should like to start to-day."

"Suppose I should not give you the address until to-morrow."

"I can pack to-day, at least," he said with a smile.

"You are not going on a wedding journey, Philip."

"Perhaps I am; who knows?"

"At least invite me to your wedding."

He went over to her impetuously. "Do you think I would marry unless you were present?"

"You seemed only concerned to have the lady there. Thank God, she is a lady! There was Mrs. Woburn's son who married a chorus girl. When your eldest brother was an hour old, Philip, I began to worry about his marriage."

"You poor dear! Mother, you shall know every detail before we fix the day."

"You are confident of a day being fixed, it seems."

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"She must consent! She loves me!" he answered proudly.

"I think she did. Yet she marched away, head in the air—there's blood there! She wouldn't hesitate——"

"She knew she'd be lost," he interposed.

"But you must not take too much for granted," his mother urged. "The obstacle might be something which you, yourself, would pause before."

"I will ask her to tell me the full truth," he answered. "After that we can really discuss the matter. May I have the address now, mother?"

"I will bring it to you at dinner."

Left alone he gave up the effort to work, for in imagination the tedious preliminaries were all over, and he had brought Constance to his home to begin the life of alternate joy and service which weaves the rich tapestry of a true marriage. They two would companion each other through days of works and dreams. He would finish his professional training with her at his side, a noble stimulus. They would go on to ever-widening interests, to an ever fuller existence.

A servant bringing him a card, interrupted his reverie. He took it and read on it a name which meant nothing to him—Edmund Hatherley.

He looked up inquiringly. "Did the visitor state his business?"

"No, sir."

"I'll come down."

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He paused on the threshold of the drawing-room, that his eyes might become accustomed to the summer dimness. Out of the gloom a tall figure emerged, and a voice said :

"This is Mr. Mangan? I am Edmund Hatherley. I come from Broadhurst."

But the name meant nothing to Philip. Constance, shrinking from all the connections of her past life, had never mentioned her recent home. He waited in courteous expectancy for his visitor to explain himself.

Edmund had planned to lead up gradually to the object of his errand, but his embarrassment sent him directly to the point.

"I am Constance Valgrave's cousin."

"Her cousin!"

The two words uttered with such fullness of joy and wonder, answered the questions which throughout the journey had tormented Edmund: What if he should find a man whose ardor had already cooled? What if Constance, in her inexperience, and influenced by her loneliness, had mistaken a mere hour of careless love-making for a genuine passion? What if this visit should be regarded as a forcing of issues?

He drew a long breath of relief. Philip came eagerly forward, holding out both hands.

"I am delighted to see you. My mother and I have just been talking of Miss Valgrave. I hope that she is well," he added, a thrill of anxiety in his voice. "We have missed her sadly this summer."

He was scanning Edmund's features for traces of

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resemblance to Constance, but found none, and he was conscious of disappointment.

"My cousin is well, but we believe that—" He paused, the embarrassment of the situation overcoming his natural ease of manner.

Philip took his hands impulsively. "I want very much to talk to you of—of Constance. Are you a messenger from her to me?"

"No; she does not know I've come."

"But someone sees she's not happy and sends you. I almost missed you. I am on the point of going to her. We'll talk it all over; but won't you be shown a bedroom first, as you've been traveling. You'll stay with us to-night?"

He was turning to ring a bell, but Edmund raised a detaining hand.

"I must go back this evening. May we go into the garden? I have to speak of intimate things."

His manner was grave and weary, and the contagion of it spread to Philip. Yet he had no apprehension concerning what he might hear.

He led the way to the rustic seat near the little river. Edmund seemed reluctant to begin his narrative, but his companion, it was evident, wished to speak of nothing else.

"Tell me," he said, "why Constance left here. I would have gone to her, but I did not know where she was living. I—I cared deeply for her, and I had reason to believe that she returned my feeling; but she made me understand that there was an obstacle—an

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insurmountable obstacle. I cannot conceive of anything that could be more than a temporary barrier between us."

He spoke with solemn enthusiasm. Edmund, regarding him and noting in his features the clear, precious signs of clean and strong adolescence, wondered if it were not, after all, worth many rejections of low-creeping and temporary passions to obtain at last the triumph of a true love. Such a love looked from this man's eyes and spoke in his accents.

"I am glad you feel so," Edmund answered. "I have come to tell you what the obstacle is. If, after knowing it, you still wish to marry my cousin, why then we can discuss the matter."

"You need not tell me. Nothing could make a difference now, unless, indeed, it were something of the nature of insanity, something that might imperil the happiness of another generation."

"It is not insanity. It is a moral obstacle, not a physical. My cousin is—an illegitimate child."

Philip turned his head away, and for a moment there was a profound silence. Edmund broke it.

"I will tell you the circumstances. It was no common case."

He began in a low, level voice—began far back in Eleanor's girlhood in the town of Broadhurst, and for over an hour Philip listened to a chronicle of family life, which in certain aspects was not altogether within his comprehension. He had been used, in his own family, to a serenity of mutual sympathies, and

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it was the more difficult, therefore, to conceive of an opposite situation. But in spite of this, some deep warmth of pleading under the gray flow of the narrative, kindled an answering heat in his own breast. He forgot for the time the daughter in picturing to himself the mother, and the father to whom Constance owed her aristocracy of body, perhaps of soul.

Edmund ended at last the story. Then Philip turned to him.

"I could not say truthfully that it makes no difference to me. I would rather have it otherwise; but it makes no difference in my feeling toward Constance, nor in my desire to marry her."

"It could not help but make a difference to you. It has been tragedy—to my cousin, as you know."

All the chivalry in Philip arose at these words, an effect which Edmund had foreseen.

"I know! I understand! I saw how unhappy she was! Where—where is her mother now?"

Edmund hesitated.

"Her mother is on the eve of departure for Europe."

He waited, wondering if Philip would rise to a still higher sympathy and comprehension. Yet it was much to expect—perhaps too much.

"You mean——?" Philip hesitated.

"I mean that she will not be in the question at all, so far as outward circumstances can set her apart. She is leaving by her own wish and without her daughter's knowledge."

Edmund knew that he was telling more than

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Eleanor would sanction, but his loyalty to her impelled him to speak.

"It would have to be without her daughter's knowledge," he went on, "for Constance would never consent. She is devoted to her mother."

"She—her mother—is then acting, as she believes, for Constance's good?"

"She believes that she is," Edmund answered, conscious of his first disappointment in Philip, who seemed to be shifting the responsibility of decision. Yet he knew that this was unreasonable. How could he expect a stranger to feel Eleanor's charm and worth through the barrier of bare, traducing facts?

Yet Philip did feel the charm of this unknown woman, even in Edmund's halting version of her "legend." His active imagination was bestowing upon her many gifts and qualities in his effort to balance these against the one immense loss which he could not wholly pardon. The missing virtue still deflected the scales. A vague jealousy awoke in him despite his endeavor to be sympathetic. He was impatient to take Constance from her present environment and to place her in the honorable sureties of wifedom. He could only agree therefore that the mother should withdraw herself. He, too, knew that to be absent is often to be pardoned.

"Constance will be left with you?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"When may I come for her?"

"Not before the tenth of next month."

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"Why the tenth?"

"It is the date her mother sets. She does not wish you to come before then," Edmund said, fulfilling to the letter his mission, yet hoping that Philip would not acquiesce.

"I understand! If I cannot come until then, may I write to Constance in the meantime?"

"No; she must be kept in ignorance until after her mother's departure."

"The departure is a certainty?"

"I believe so," Edmund said brusquely. Jealousy was striving in his heart for the mother whose sacrifice, it seemed, was so readily accepted.

"I—I shall write to—Mrs. Valgrave in your care, and ask her for her daughter's hand, unless, indeed, you or she should give me permission to go to Broadhurst at once."

It was evident that Philip would omit no due courtesy, yet Edmund saw that the mother's absence from the scene would be a relief to him. His traditions were scarcely less strong than his love.

"You may write if you wish, but, under the circumstances, I think you had better not come to Broadhurst until the tenth. My aunt desires that it should be so, and I think she knows best."

"Very well. I shall comply. I shall come on the tenth. If there be no special reason for delay, I should like the marriage to take place soon. I can satisfy your father, Mr. Hatherley, as to all practical points."

Edmund assented, and rose to take his departure.

THE GREATER LOVE

He did not feel inclined to linger, now that the business of his visit was over.

"Will you not come to the house and meet my mother? She would be delighted to see you. She is very fond of—Constance."

Edmund pleaded the exigency of train time, knowing that the meeting between himself and Mrs. Mangan could not be altogether without embarrassment to his young host. He had softer feelings toward him since Philip's proposal, however perfunctory, to appear at once in Broadhurst. He was evidently trying to carry through all the conventional observances of acknowledged romance in an unconventional situation—a situation by no means easy for four-and-twenty to deal with!

When the train had borne his visitor away, Philip walked home slowly along the country road, almost ready to believe the whole episode a dream. He took out the card with the address Edmund had left, to make sure that the visit had really occurred.

In the garden he met Wilhelmina. He knelt on one knee before her, and took her chubby hands in his.

"Can you keep a secret until to-morrow morning, or until I give you leave to tell it?"

"Try me," she answered.

"I am going away soon, to bring someone back here whom you love!"

Her eyes grew big.

"Not my dear Constance?"

THE GREATER LOVE

"Yes. I am going to marry her."

"Why haven't you done it before?" she demanded.

"I couldn't."

She grew thoughtful. "She will love you better than me."

"In a different way, Baby."

"I don't care. I get her back."

He kissed her rapturously. "I get her back," he echoed.

The next duty was to tell his mother. He shrank from it, knowing how deep-rooted in her was her pride of family, of aristocratic blood, aristocratic in moral tradition as well as in social situation. He anticipated protest.

He waited until after dinner, and then under shelter of the darkness as they sat together on the porch, he told her of Edmund's visit, and of what it had revealed. She made no comment until he had finished. Then she said:

"She did not, after all, exaggerate the nature of the obstacle. It is as bad as it could possibly be."

Her voice was distressed, but not hard, and that comforted Philip.

"It is bad, but it is not insurmountable. Her—her father was of aristocratic birth. He would have married Mrs. Valgrave if he had lived."

"Ah, but the moral taint," she sighed. "Who knows what wildness of the blood you may transmit to your children, Philip."

"We'll pray them into salvation before their birth,"

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he said, with solemn ardor. "Constance has a soul of heavenly purity. You know that, mother."

"I believe that she is a good and true girl. But I believe, also, that you would be running a great risk in marrying her. She was right in going away under the circumstances. Her mother seems to me less wise in reaching out for this marriage."

Philip rose to her defense.

"She longs naturally for her daughter's happiness. And you must admit that she did not leave me in the dark or spare herself as she might well have done. She tells the truth and withdraws her claim from a child whom she apparently loves more than anything on earth."

Mrs. Mangan made no attempt to answer these arguments. She merely fell back on what she believed to be natural prudence and common sense, though she had but a faint hope of the success of her arguments.

"I think you'll do wrong if you insist upon this marriage now. Let Constance go with her mother to Paris. Let a year, two years go by; then if you both feel the same way——"

"I cannot do that," he interrupted. "I am sure, mother, that I am right to take her now, to protect her now, to make her happy now. When you meet the final, the ultimate woman, you do not wait for the years to tell you how much or how little she means to you. I know my wife when I see her."

Her own strong spirit approved his words, though her voice urged caution.

THE GREATER LOVE

"Then take her," she said in a tone of resignation to the inevitable. "If you love each other enough, you may overcome all the difficulties I see in the way. Mrs. Valgrave, herself, removes much by her withdrawal. She leaves Constance no choice but to go to you."

"I shall bring her to her real home," he said.

She gave him her blessing, though with sadness, and being a religious woman, she went to her room soon after to pray for grace to keep her hands from manipulating clay whose pattern the divine potter was but dimly revealing to her.

CHAPTER XLV

THE day after his call on Philip, Edmund went to make his report to Eleanor, who met him by appointment at a turn of the road below the farm where they could be sure of an uninterrupted conversation.

Her eagerness had sent her to the meeting-place a half-hour before the time appointed. She walked up and down the road, trying to restrain her imagination, which in spite of herself would picture miracles. When Edmund came she received him with tremulous eagerness, scarcely waiting for his greeting to begin her questions. He read beneath them the inevitable hope of a reprieve from the full logic of her decision, and his heart sank. He would give a kingdom to be able to say that Philip wished to include her in the fortunate outcome of his love. She probed delicately for such good tidings. Edmund hastened to bring forth the best that he had.

"He offered to come at once. He—he was eager to come at once, but I said it was your desire that he should not come until the tenth."

"Dear Edmund!" She was silent for a moment. "He—he offered, but he isn't here with you!"

"I told him it was your distinct wish——"

"I know! I know! It's well I made my decision,

THE GREATER LOVE

Edmund. It's all transpiring as I believed it would. He loves Constance enough to marry her after he has learned the truth about her, and I thank God for that! But he and his people would be embarrassed by my being a part of the picture. It's natural."

"I wish he could meet you," Edmund said. "Everything would be right then."

She shook her head.

"No, everything would not be right. I should be measured always as a law-breaker—a debtor who could never pay."

"It's harsh," Edmund said, avoiding her eyes.

"It's just," she answered. "It's the piper's price. I know at last it's just, and that helps me."

"You have won us all; you would win them."

"I am not so sure. Tell me about Philip. Tell me every detail—how he looks, how he speaks, everything."

Edmund branched readily enough into this division of the subject, glad to tell her the many good things he could fairly say of Philip Mangan. She listened as the blind listen, filling out the portrait with her own eager vision, at times transfiguring it to meet the height of her requirement for the man whom Constance loved.

The next day Edmund brought her Philip's letter which had been forwarded in his care. It was short, but of an extreme courtesy and deference, which left her unsatisfied. She scarcely knew for what she hungered.

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Her reply was couched in the same official language. She spent a long time in reaching this standard of diplomacy, for her heart, not her brain, was fain to choose the words. When the letter had been posted she went to William's office. She wanted to talk to him alone, before she saw Isabel.

He received her cordially, and took her into his private room. Even to his by no means keen perceptions she seemed in no ordinary mood. He was conscious of her intensity of feeling, but he could not tell whether its nature was of joy or sorrow.

"You know, perhaps, I am planning to return to Paris," she began.

"I knew you had been thinking of it."

"I am sailing on the tenth."

"So soon!" He looked disturbed, somewhat aggrieved. Would Eleanor never learn that precipitate action is not favorable to the solidarity of family life!

"Yes; it is better for me to go as soon as possible."

"I suppose Constance is getting restless."

"I am not taking Constance with me."

He sat open-mouthed, too astonished for a moment to speak.

"It surprises you! It does not seem to have occurred to you that the child might form new ties. She has formed them, in spirit, I mean. I've come to let you know. It's the event which makes me, as they say, 'die happy.'"

She told him the story. She saw how much it pleased him from the worldly point of view, and she

THE GREATER LOVE

forbore from reminding him of the void it would create in her own life. Yet it hurt her to hear his delighted comments over the wealth and social importance of the Mangan family, of whom, he declared, he had heard from his boyhood. Constance could not have done better. It was a piece of extraordinary good fortune. He quite approved of Eleanor's resolution to steal away quietly, leaving Constance no choice but to marry Philip. The hand of the Lord was surely in the matter!

"We'll do everything in the world for the child," he said heartily. "We'll write you by every steamer. Isabel will see to her trousseau. She'll be in her element planning lacey things."

"Yes, she'll care more than Constance. I think she'll—miss—her mother. But you mustn't let her follow me or try to get word to me. You must tell her I'll not write to her until she's married. You see I'm pushing her——"

He reached out his hand and laid it upon hers. Through his worldly satisfaction he was beginning to be conscious of her part in the matter.

"I'll do everything you wish, Nellie. I see what you want—to start her on her married life——"

"——detached from everything that would be a difficulty," she interrupted. "Philip Mangan will marry your niece—as far as the mere setting goes—not my daughter."

He looked his compassion. "It's hard on you, Nell," he said. "But you've a strong will."

THE GREATER LOVE

"It's not my will; it's the logic of the whole situation. I fought it for years," she said in a lower tone. "I thought I had escaped it, but I hadn't, so I've given in."

"You don't think you could stay?" he asked doubtfully.

"Constance would feel a divided allegiance if she were within reach of me. I want to be out of reach until she and her husband become really one. I don't mean the marriage ceremony, but the years that follow, the growing into unity—as I pray they will."

"Can you keep her from you?" he exclaimed, and his words gave her a momentary pleasure.

"The ocean is a big barrier; and then she'll have Philip. He is to arrive soon after my early leaving. She'll scarcely have time to realize that I've gone, and when she does, he'll be there to comfort her."

His clasp on her hand tightened. "Tell me about your Paris arrangements. I want to be sure you're going to be comfortable over there and not lonely."

"Oh, as for that, I shall be lonely, but I shall work hard. There's always the blessedness of work."

That at least he could understand. He glanced about his office, then through the window at the big, prosperous mills just across the road.

"Well, you've made a lot out of your life," he said complacently; "even though you've never acknowledged that you—" he hesitated, poised in judgment—"that you were in the wrong."

THE GREATER LOVE

"I can't regret a liberal education."

"I am glad you can look on it as such."

He could not follow her, but he accepted her words and was content. The enigma she was to him still held elements of irritation, but he was beginning to think more of their sympathies than of their differences.

"Are you going to see Isabel?" he asked. "I'll walk to the house with you."

"I want to see her about—the marriage. I want her to take over all the details, clothes—and other matters."

"She'll be in her element," William said again with a chuckle. "I think she never got over not having a daughter of her own."

They walked slowly up the main street together, and on the way met more than one parishioner of St. Michael's. Eleanor returned their greetings without embarrassment. Indifference to praise or blame had been one of the first fruits of her taking her problem into her own hands.

Isabel received the news they brought her with wonder, and then with an ever-growing appreciation of the opportunities of the situation. To have Constance to herself; to plan all the dainty things which make up a wedding wardrobe, was a prospect which delighted her. After a while William left the two women together.

"She will probably want just her family about her," Eleanor said. "So you need only send announcements after the marriage."

THE GREATER LOVE

"In your name, dear?"

"No; in William's."

Isabel nodded and refrained from comment. She had more than once, during the interview, an impulse to lay her hand affectionately on her sister-in-law's arm, but she held back. She said to herself that she should show her what she felt in other ways. She would write regularly to Eleanor, and perhaps William would take her to visit her in Paris. She was already, in imagination, in the French capital. She leaned over confidentially.

"Don't you prefer embroidery without lace, and eye-lets to run the ribbon through?"

"Yes, anything you wish. You mustn't let Constance try to get to me—no matter how hard she pleads."

"No, indeed!"

"And hurry the marriage. It is best for her."

"It will depend on the dressmakers and tailors."

"Don't overload her, and don't trouble her with these matters. She doesn't care herself, you know, very much."

"I'll not distress her with it," Isabel said with a sudden access of common sense. "After all, the better the dressmaker, the less the customer has to be concerned."

Eleanor nodded acquiescence to this morsel of feminine wisdom, but her thoughts were with her child standing on the threshold of a new destiny; and the jealousy in her heart died. After all, would she not

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be more truly present at this wedding than these ministrants to its material and worldly aspects?

She was released from Isabel's volubility at last by the announcement that James Sutro was at the door waiting to drive her home, and she took her leave, thankful that this part of her ordeal was over. When they were well out of the town, she told him as much as was necessary of her plan to return to Paris.

He listened gravely, and when she had concluded, he said:

"We'll miss you, but I've known for weeks we couldn't keep you at the farm."

"It has been a warm shelter."

"You taught me what to do with it. I am to have another 'toy.' Mr. Bradmore has bought the farm next ours, and I am to take charge of it. I'm to go West to buy for him from time to time. So, I'll have a chance to work off my restlessness, and see the world, too."

"Oh, I am glad."

She knew that this was in part the result of chance bits of conversation concerning Sutro that she had had with Bradmore, and she was grateful.

"I'll never forget that you first told me how to get the better of this place," he said. "Even my mother begins to understand. The St. Michael has helped her to understand. It's the only beautiful thing she ever had, quite her own."

When they arrived Constance was standing at the edge of the garden looking anxiously down the road.

THE GREATER LOVE

"Why did you steal away from me? I've been hours and hours alone!"

The sweet reproach in her voice thrilled Eleanor. Their perfect harmony in the years gone by seemed, for the moment to the mother, the only reality. What had taken place in the valley below was a sad and weary dream. She put her arms about her daughter, and went back into the old joy of complete and inseparable union, now receding fast.

CHAPTER XLVI

ELEANOR filled these last days with all the pleasures of loving companionship that her heart-hunger could suggest. Constance responded more completely than she had done since her return and with less self-consciousness. The barriers created by the events of the past year seemed to melt away in the sunlight of a new understanding, a deeper love. Eleanor wondered sometimes if her daughter felt, as through a dream, the shadows of the coming change and entered into peace with all the past as they do who are dying into a new life. Constance asked few questions about their future, seemingly content to wait her mother's pleasure in the matter of returning to Paris. So the days slipped by.

Edmund brought her the frequent letters he received from Philip, who was impatiently waiting the advent of the tenth. Eleanor read and re-read these, seeking in every phrase illumination upon the personality of the man whom Constance loved. His intrinsic excellence seemed the assured point of departure. Would this union become at last, through its fullness and beauty, inclusive even of her own debarred existence? Only the years could tell.

THE GREATER LOVE

She planned to leave Broadhurst on an early morning train of the tenth, that she might be with her daughter until the final moment, and that she might the more easily take her departure without Constance's knowledge. The eve of the day came. She had thought to fill it with loving, reminiscent converse—the last precious gold—but she found herself silent and weary. The long strain was beginning to tell upon her, and, as so often happens when a climax arrives, looked forward to for days as the summing up of superlative emotion, the tired brain and heart sink back into commonplaces and the last hours hold nothing extraordinary.

But when Constance slept her mother watched, gazing, as on that first night of reunion, at the beloved face, seeking to engrave forever upon her soul the features which would bear henceforth the imprint of other forces—new ties and new duties.

While it was still dark she rose and dressed, and slipped quietly out of the bedroom, not daring even to kiss her daughter. She had planned to leave a long letter explaining everything, but in the end she wrote only a line, the kind of loving message that she used to leave for Constance when called away unexpectedly for an hour or two. She pinned the note to the cushion of the dressing-table.

Edmund was waiting for her downstairs. He looked as if his own night had been sleepless. His manner was solemn and tender.

“She did not waken?” he said.

THE GREATER LOVE

"No. I left her sleeping soundly, but I wish you would return here at once after you take me down. I should like you to be with her until Philip comes."

"I shall not leave her," he promised. "I can come back at once. Father and Uncle Tom will be at the station, and Gertrude."

Mrs. Sutro pressed her to eat the elaborate breakfast she had prepared, but Eleanor scarcely touched the food. Her one anxiety was to be gone before Constance should awake and miss her.

They drove away at last through the morning twilight. James Sutro was waiting to open the carriage-gate for them. She held out her hand to him silently. He pressed it and walked quickly away. When they reached the road she turned and looked back at the farmhouse. She had a wild impulse to ask Edmund to stop—that she could not go away! She could not bear it!

It passed, and she felt more calm. As on the evening before, she longed to utter words that should bind her irrevocably to the destinies of those whom she was leaving, words at once prophetic and illuminating, the true expressions of her love and of her sorrow; of her desire to be united at last to her own people if only in those shadowy regions where all generations are as one. These thoughts, like great wings, swept through her mind, but she could not utter them.

Edmund, himself, made no effort to speak or to conceal his dejection.

"Isabel asked yesterday for Constance's glove

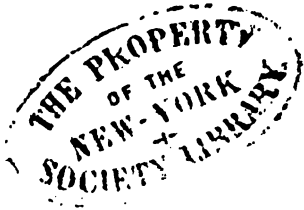
THE GREATER LOVE

number, and I forgot to give it to her. She wears sixes."

He nodded.

"I'll tell her. I'll remember everything."

They had been driving westward, but now a sharp turn of the road on the hillside brought them suddenly face to face with the morning. The shadows of night still lingered in the valley, but above the hills up to which Eleanor's eyes had been so often lifted, streaks of gold and purple heralded the new day. The dawn was breaking.



THE END





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